

# Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2021

## Public attitudes to Gaelic in Scotland – Main report



---

At **ScotCen Social Research** we believe that social research has the power to make life better. By really understanding the complexity of people's lives and what they think about the issues that affect them, we give the public a powerful and influential role in shaping decisions and services that can make a difference to everyone. And as an independent, not for profit organisation we're able to put all our time and energy into delivering social research that works for society.

---

**ScotCen**  
Social Research



THE UNIVERSITY  
*of* EDINBURGH

**Authors:** Lucy Dean<sup>1</sup>, Fiona O'Hanlon<sup>2</sup>, Stephen Hinchliffe<sup>1</sup>, Alex Scholes<sup>1</sup>, John Curtice<sup>1</sup>, Rachel Whitford<sup>1</sup>, Victoria Wilson<sup>1</sup>, Cate Standing-Tattersall<sup>1</sup> and Alys Daniels-Creasey<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ScotCen Social Research, Edinburgh.

<sup>2</sup> University of Edinburgh.

**Date:** 29/06/2022

**Prepared for:** Bòrd na Gàidhlig

ScotCen Social Research  
Scotiabank House  
6 South Charlotte Street  
Edinburgh, EH2 4AW  
T 0131 240 0210  
[www.scotcen.org.uk](http://www.scotcen.org.uk)

A Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England No.4392418.  
A Charity registered in England and Wales (1091768) and Scotland (SC038454)

---

# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Background and methodology .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Background.....	1
1.2	Questions and analysis.....	1
1.2.1	Questionnaire development.....	1
1.2.2	Questions and analysis.....	2
1.2.3	Comparing responses to 2012 survey .....	5
1.3	Methodology .....	6
<b>2</b>	<b>Knowledge of Gaelic .....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1	Ability to speak Gaelic.....	7
2.2	Understanding of Gaelic .....	9
2.3	Overall knowledge of Gaelic .....	11
2.4	Whether the public would like to be able to speak Gaelic better than they do now.....	12
<b>3</b>	<b>Exposure to Gaelic.....</b>	<b>15</b>
3.1	Exposure to Gaelic in childhood.....	15
3.2	Exposure to Gaelic in the media .....	17
3.3	Exposure to Gaelic in childhood and in the media or online in the last 12 months.....	19
3.4	Exposure to Gaelic signs .....	21
<b>4</b>	<b>Attitudes to Gaelic speaking and Gaelic signage.....</b>	<b>25</b>
4.1	Attitudes towards hearing people speak Gaelic .....	26
4.2	Attitudes towards Gaelic signage.....	28
<b>5</b>	<b>Views on learning Gaelic.....</b>	<b>32</b>
5.1	Whether learning Gaelic gives someone a sense of achievement and improves someone's chances of getting a job .....	32
5.2	Attitudes towards whether learning Gaelic makes someone more Scottish.....	37
<b>6</b>	<b>Gaelic and cultural heritage .....</b>	<b>39</b>
6.1	The importance of Gaelic to one's own cultural heritage .....	39
6.2	The importance of Gaelic to the cultural heritage of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.....	41
6.3	The importance of Gaelic to Scotland's cultural heritage .....	43
<b>7</b>	<b>Gaelic in education.....</b>	<b>46</b>
7.1	Languages thought most important to study .....	46
7.2	Attitudes towards teaching the Gaelic language to all children .....	49
7.3	Attitudes towards teaching Gaelic culture and history to all children.....	52

---

7.4	Attitudes towards Gaelic-medium education .....	53
<b>8</b>	<b>Public spending on Gaelic.....</b>	<b>56</b>
8.1	Views on Government spending on Gaelic .....	56
<b>9</b>	<b>The future of Gaelic.....</b>	<b>62</b>
9.1	Thoughts on whether Gaelic will be spoken more widely in 50 years' time.....	62
9.2	Thoughts on whether people would like Gaelic to be spoken more widely in 50 years' time.....	66
	<b>Conclusions and recommendations .....</b>	<b>70</b>
	<b>Appendix A. Table 1 .....</b>	<b>73</b>
	<b>References.....</b>	<b>74</b>

---

# 1 Background and methodology

## 1.1 Background

This report presents the findings from the 2021 Scottish Social Attitudes survey (SSA) on public attitudes towards Gaelic in Scotland. The module of questions was funded by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, the non-departmental public body which works to facilitate access to the Gaelic language and culture, and to encourage the use and learning of the Gaelic language. Since its establishment in 2005, Bòrd na Gàidhlig has supported a range of policy initiatives which aim to increase the visibility and status of the Gaelic language in public life in Scotland, to encourage the learning and use of the language amongst children and adults, and to promote Gaelic as a key aspect of Scottish social, cultural and economic life. Research into public attitudes to Gaelic is key to assessing progress against these aims, and to informing future policy direction for the Gaelic language and culture. The principal objectives of the Gaelic questions in the 2021 SSA were to understand public attitudes to the Gaelic language and culture in 2021, and to measure changes in attitudes in the last decade since questions on the same topic were last asked on SSA in 2012.<sup>1</sup>

The Scottish Social Attitudes survey is run annually by ScotCen Social Research with the aim of collecting high quality data about public attitudes on issues relevant to Scotland.

The 2021 SSA panel survey<sup>2</sup> was undertaken between the 23rd September and 24th October 2021. In this survey 1,365 randomly selected adults aged 18+ from across Scotland took part. The data has been weighted to be representative of Scotland in terms of age, sex, region and other socio-economic characteristics<sup>3</sup>.

## 1.2 Questions and analysis

### 1.2.1 Questionnaire development

As one of the main aims of this module was to establish whether attitudes towards Gaelic in Scotland have changed in the last decade, many of the questions asked on the SSA survey in 2021 were repeated from the 2012 survey.

The following measures and attitudes have been compared over time:

- Knowledge of Gaelic including speaking and understanding of the language
- Exposure to Gaelic during childhood and in the last 12 months through the media or online / via apps and through road, street or other public signs
- Attitudes towards the use of Gaelic on road, street or other public signs across Scotland and how people feel when they hear Gaelic being spoken

---

<sup>1</sup> SSA 2012 was undertaken face-to-face in people's homes, but in 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the survey was undertaken primarily via the web (with a telephone option). See 1.2.3 'Comparing responses to 2012 survey' for more detail.

<sup>2</sup> The questions on Gaelic were asked on the SSA 2021 panel survey which was one of the two SSA surveys run in 2021 (the other was a telephone only survey which contained modules funded only by the Scottish Government which is referred to as the SSA 2021 survey).

<sup>3</sup> Weighting was applied to the data to adjust for non-response using the following variables: age and sex, region of Scotland, household type, household income, education level, ethnicity, tenure, social class group, economic activity, political party identification and interest in politics. Further detail is provided in the SSA 2021 Public Attitudes to Gaelic – Technical Information.

- 
- Perception of the importance of Gaelic to one's own cultural heritage, that of the Highlands and Islands, and that of Scotland as a whole
  - Views on whether Gaelic should be taught as a school subject to all children aged 5 to 15 across Scotland
  - Attitudes towards Scottish Government spending on Gaelic
  - Views on future use of the Gaelic language

In addition, some new questions were included in the 2021 survey to measure views about Gaelic in Scotland on:

- Views on learning Gaelic
- Views on which languages are most important for children in Scotland to learn
- Extent to which people are in favour of or against having some primary schools in Scotland where all teaching is in Gaelic
- Views on whether children in Scotland should be taught about Gaelic history and culture at school

In order to inform the development of the final set of questions, all of the new questions were cognitively tested and / or piloted between July and September 2021.

The aim of the cognitive testing was to ask a sample of respondents (14 people) a subset of the full survey questions being proposed, including four questions on Gaelic. This was followed by asking them a selection of probes to check whether they were interpreting the questions and associated answer options consistently. Adaptations were made to several questions as a result of the cognitive testing.

The aim of the survey pilot was to ask some of the questions being proposed for the main survey of a sufficient sample to establish whether the questions were understood in the context of the survey, whether respondents raised any issues with any of the questions and to look at the distribution of answers. The pilot sample consisted of 83 respondents out of a sample of 167 selected randomly from ScotCen panel members living in Scotland<sup>4</sup>. The pilot included 14 questions on knowledge of Gaelic, exposure to Gaelic and attitudes towards Gaelic. Adaptations were made to the final set of questions in light of the findings of the pilot.

## 1.2.2 Questions and analysis

Chapters 2 to 9 of this report present the findings on each of the measures of knowledge of Gaelic, exposure and attitudes towards Gaelic described above, according to the following topic areas:

- Chapter 2 – Knowledge of Gaelic
- Chapter 3 – Exposure to Gaelic
- Chapter 4 – Attitudes to Gaelic signage & Gaelic speaking
- Chapter 5 – Views on learning Gaelic
- Chapter 6 – Gaelic and cultural heritage
- Chapter 7 – Gaelic in education

---

<sup>4</sup> ScotCen Panel members are recruited from the Scottish Social Attitudes survey (SSA) which interviews those aged 16 and over across Scotland (including the Highlands and Islands). Those interviewed as part of the SSA in 2015, 2016, 2017 were asked to join the Panel at the end of the SSA interview. Further information on the sample is included in the SSA 2021 Public Attitudes to Gaelic in Scotland – Technical Information.

- Chapter 8 – Public spending on Gaelic
- Chapter 9 – The future of Gaelic

The SSA 2021 Gaelic Annex Tables provide the full tables for each of these chapters (2-9) cross-tabulated by the standard and any additional analysis variables described below. These can be referred to alongside the relevant chapters in this report. Whilst the annex tables follow the order / numbering of the chapters the annex table numbers do not directly match the tables within the report as the tables provide a full breakdown of each of the questions asked in relation to Gaelic cross-tabulated by each of the sub-groups.

The following socio-demographic, background and attitudinal variables, also captured in the survey, have been used to analyse the core measures on Gaelic:

Variable	Categories
Sex	1. Female 2. Male
Age category	1. 18-29 2. 30-39 3. 40-49 4. 50-59 5. 60-69 6. 70+
Highest level of educational qualification	1. Degree / HE equivalent 2. Highers / A levels or equivalent 3. Standard Grade / GCSE or equivalent 4. Other qualification 5. No qualifications
Monthly equivalised household income <sup>5</sup>	1. £1000 or less 2. £1001 to £1500 3. £1501 to £2500 4. More than £2500
Main economic activity <sup>6</sup>	1. Full-time education 2. Paid work 3. Unemployed 4. Retired 5. Other
Whether respondent speaks a language other than English fluently	1. Yes 2. No
Knowledge of Gaelic (combined measure on the speaking and understanding of Gaelic) <sup>7</sup>	1. Does not speak or understand any Gaelic 2. Speaks or understands the odd word of Gaelic 3. Speaks or understands at least a few simple sentences of Gaelic
Exposure to Gaelic (combined measure of exposure during childhood and in the last	1. During childhood and regular recent exposure (at least once a week)

<sup>5</sup> Equivalised income is a measure of household income that takes account of the differences in a household's size and composition, and thus is made 'equivalent' for all household sizes and compositions.

<sup>6</sup> The question asked, 'Which of these descriptions applied to what you were doing in the last week (that is the last 7 days ending...?' And the response categories are combined into full-time education, paid work, unemployed, retired and other.

<sup>7</sup> The questions asked 'Can you understand Gaelic at all, even if it's just the odd word? And 'Can you speak Gaelic at all, even if it's just the odd word? (Response options are: Not at all, The odd word, A few simple sentences, Parts of conversations, Most conversations, All conversations / fluent speaker)



12 months through the media or online / via apps) <sup>8</sup>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. During childhood and irregular recent exposure (less than once a week)</li> <li>3. During childhood and no recent exposure<sup>9</sup></li> <li>4. Not during childhood but regular recent exposure (at least once a week)</li> <li>5. Not during childhood and irregular recent exposure (less than once a week)</li> <li>6. Not during childhood and no recent exposure</li> </ol>
Whether there are any children living in the household	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes</li> <li>2. No</li> </ol>

For some topics / attitudes, additional analysis variables have been used. These include the following:

Variable	Categories
Extent to which people would like to be able to speak Gaelic better than they do now	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A great deal</li> <li>2. Somewhat</li> <li>3. A little</li> <li>4. Not at all</li> </ol>
Level of exposure to road, street and other public signage in Gaelic within the last 12 months	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. More than once a week</li> <li>2. About once a week</li> <li>3. Less often than once a week but at least once a month</li> <li>4. Less often than once a month</li> <li>5. Never</li> </ol>
Thoughts about having road, street and other public signs in Scotland in both Gaelic and English	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Should be in Gaelic and English across Scotland</li> <li>2. Should be in Gaelic and English where Gaelic is spoken</li> <li>3. Should be in English only</li> </ol>
Level of comfort when hearing people speaking to each other in Gaelic	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Very comfortable</li> <li>2. Comfortable</li> <li>3. Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable</li> <li>4. Uncomfortable</li> <li>5. Very uncomfortable</li> <li>6. Never heard this language spoken</li> </ol>
Views on whether learning Gaelic makes someone more Scottish	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Agree strongly</li> <li>2. Agree</li> <li>3. Neither agree nor disagree</li> <li>4. Disagree</li> <li>5. Disagree Strongly</li> </ol>
Whether Gaelic is considered to be one of the two most important languages for children in Scotland to study (from a list of European and international languages <sup>10</sup> )	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes</li> <li>2. No</li> </ol>

<sup>8</sup> The questions asked 'Did you ever hear Gaelic being spoken when you were a child, either at home or among your wider family or community? (Yes or No) And 'During the last 12 months, how often have you heard, read or seen Gaelic on TV, radio, online or through apps?' (response options in the following order: More than once a week, About once a week, Less often than once a week but at least once a month, Less often than once a month, Never).

<sup>9</sup> As there were between >24 and 50 respondents in this category the data for this response option should be interpreted as an estimate based on a small sample size. Therefore, discussion on sub-group differences according to this variable throughout the report focus on differences among the other five categories.

<sup>10</sup> List included: French, Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, Gaelic, Polish, German and Other (specify)



Perceived importance of Gaelic to one's own cultural heritage	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Very important</li> <li>2. Fairly important</li> <li>3. Not very important</li> <li>4. Not at all important</li> </ol>
Perceived importance of Gaelic to the cultural heritage of the Highlands and Islands	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Very important</li> <li>2. Fairly important</li> <li>3. Not very important</li> <li>4. Not at all important</li> </ol>
Perceived importance of Gaelic to the cultural heritage of Scotland	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Very important</li> <li>2. Fairly important</li> <li>3. Not very important</li> <li>4. Not at all important</li> </ol>
Whether learning Gaelic improves someone's chances of getting a job	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Agree strongly</li> <li>2. Agree</li> <li>3. Neither agree nor disagree</li> <li>4. Disagree</li> <li>5. Disagree strongly</li> </ol>
Views on the current level of Scottish Government spending on promoting the use of Gaelic	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Too much</li> <li>2. Too little</li> <li>3. About right</li> </ol>
Whether in favour or against having some primary schools in Scotland where all teaching is in Gaelic rather than English	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strongly in favour</li> <li>2. Somewhat in favour</li> <li>3. Neither in favour nor against</li> <li>4. Somewhat against</li> <li>5. Strongly against</li> </ol>
Views on whether those aged 5 to 15 should all be taught Gaelic as a school subject for an hour or two a week	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Agree strongly</li> <li>2. Agree</li> <li>3. Neither agree nor disagree</li> <li>4. Disagree</li> <li>5. Disagree strongly</li> </ol>

For the full list of questions on Gaelic asked on this survey in 2021, see the SSA 2021 Public Attitudes to Gaelic in Scotland - Technical Information.

### 1.2.3 Comparing responses to 2012 survey

Many of the questions asked on the SSA survey in 2021 were repeated from the 2012 survey (as outlined in section 1.2.1), therefore the report presents comparisons between these two years for such questions.

Whilst the sampling approaches used in 2012 and 2021 are comparable and the weighting adjusted for any sampling bias, the mode of the survey has changed from a face-to-face survey to a primarily online survey (with a telephone option for those who do not want to / cannot complete it online). This change in mode was primarily introduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions that were in place during some of the survey fieldwork period. Whilst the mode of data collection is different, there is no indication that this would notably impact on the way participants respond to these particular questions and therefore any differences observed between 2012 and 2021 reflect changes in public attitudes and are not a function of the change in data collection approach.

As a result of the change in the mode of data collection, in order to retain comparability any 'Don't know' or 'Refused to answer' responses given by participants to any of the questions on Gaelic in 2012 and 2021 have been excluded from the data presented in this report. As the 'Don't know' and 'Refused to answer' options were asked slightly

---

differently in 2012 and 2021<sup>11</sup>, it has not been possible to interpret whether any changes to the proportion of respondents selecting 'Don't know' or 'Refused to answer' during this time were due to changes in attitudes or due to the change in methodology. It is worth noting that 'Don't know' and 'Refused to answer' only made up between 0.1 and 1% of all responses to any of the questions in 2021. In 2012 there were higher proportions of 'Can't choose' or 'Refused to answer' to certain questions, most likely because these options were more explicit within the self-completion questions. Therefore, there may be relatively small differences in some of the 2012 figures provided within this report compared with the report published in 2012<sup>a</sup>.

## 1.3 Methodology

In 2021, data were collected for this module through the ScotCen Panel which is based on a random probability design, with panel members originally selected at random<sup>12</sup> and encouraged to take part in this survey.

The fieldwork approach employed a sequential mixed mode design where panel members were first invited to participate in the research online before being contacted by telephone if they had not completed the interview after two weeks. A £5 Love2shop voucher was sent as a 'thank you' to those who participated.

The survey respondents were all adults living in Scotland at the time of the survey. The ScotCen Panel consists of a random sample of people who were originally interviewed face-to-face for a Scottish Social Attitudes (SSA) survey, for which all adults aged 16+<sup>13</sup> living in Scotland (including the Highlands and Islands) are eligible or were interviewed for a British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey. BSA interviews those aged 18+ and living across Britain (south of the Caledonian Canal).

Panel members recruited from SSA 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2019 or BSA 2018, 2019 and 2020 (aged 18-24 only in 2020) who had not subsequently left the panel or become 'inactive' were approached to participate.

A total of 1,365 interviews were completed and the survey response rate was 39% for ScotCen panelists from SSA and 79% for panelists from BSA<sup>14</sup>.

The data has been weighted to be representative of Scotland in terms of age, sex, region and other socio-economic characteristics. Responses are weighted for non-response by the following variables: age and sex groups, region of Scotland, SSA / BSA year, household type, household income, education level, ethnicity, tenure / housing type, social class group, economic activity, political party identification and interest in politics.

For further details on sampling and weighting and the change in mode to the survey since 2012 see the SSA 2021 Public Attitudes to Gaelic in Scotland - Technical Information.

---

<sup>11</sup> When the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey was a face-to-face survey some questions were asked in a self-completion module where respondents could answer questions on a laptop rather than read aloud by the interviewer. In the self-completion module 'Can't choose' or 'Don't know' and 'Refused to answer' were shown among the list of the response options. Whereas on the web panel surveys 'Don't know' and 'Refused' are only given as response options if the respondent cannot select from the main options provided and skips to the next screen without selecting an option.

<sup>12</sup> The Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (SSA) and British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA) are high-quality, random probability: this means that households and individuals are selected at random, and then field interviewers make considerable effort to achieve an interview including visiting the selected addresses multiple times. More details of the SSA sampling approach can be found here:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-social-attitudes-2019-technical-report/documents/>

<sup>13</sup> Although respondents aged 16+ were included in the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey from 2017, the sample for this survey only includes those aged 18+ (due to low numbers aged 16-18).

<sup>14</sup> For more detail see the SSA 2021 Public Attitudes to Gaelic in Scotland Technical Information

---

## 2 Knowledge of Gaelic

This chapter presents the reported level of knowledge of Gaelic amongst the public. It explores self-reported ability in terms of understanding and speaking Gaelic across Scotland, using a six-point response scale (no ability, the odd word, a few simple sentences, parts of conversations, most conversations, fluent). As the same questions on knowledge of Gaelic were asked in the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey in 2012 and 2021, the chapter compares reported levels of knowledge of Gaelic amongst the public in Scotland over time. In so doing, the survey provides complementary data to the decennial Census data which asks whether people can understand, speak, read and / or write Gaelic with a simple Yes / No response option. Finally the Chapter also explores respondents' views of whether or not they would like to improve their own Gaelic skills.

The findings cover:

- Self-reported level of Gaelic speaking ability
- Self-reported level of understanding of Gaelic
- A combined measure of level of speaking and understanding of Gaelic
- Views on the extent to which they would like to be able to speak Gaelic better than they do now.

Sub-group analysis is presented for each of these questions, to explore whether exposure is associated with demographic variables of sex, age, highest level of education, household income (monthly equivalised), economic status, fluency in another language in addition to English, and exposure to Gaelic.

A combined measure of exposure to Gaelic during childhood and in the media / online in the last 12 months has been used for the purpose of analysis which combines responses from the following two questions<sup>15</sup>:

- 'Did you ever hear Gaelic being spoken when you were a child, either at home or among your wider family or community?' (Yes or No)
- 'During the last 12 months, how often have you heard, read or seen Gaelic on TV, radio, online or through apps?' (More than once a week, About once a week, Less than once a week but at least once a month, Less often than once a month or Never)

Later chapters (Chapters 4-9) will explore associations between knowledge of Gaelic and attitudes to Gaelic and its use in public life.

### 2.1 Ability to speak Gaelic

Respondents were asked about their proficiency in speaking Gaelic. The results are shown in Table 2.1.

---

<sup>15</sup> See the Background and Methods for detail of the categories of this combined measure

Table 2.1: 'Can you speak Gaelic at all, even if it's just the odd word?'

	2012	2021
	%	%
Not at all	85	70
The odd word	13	24
A few simple sentences	1	4
At least parts of conversations*	0	2
<i>Weighted base</i>	1229	1365
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1229	1365

Base: All respondents

\*This combines those who can speak parts of conversations, most conversations and fluent speakers. Note that total figures for collapsed categories may differ by 1% in the table and the text due to rounding in tables to 0 decimal places.

In 2021, 70% cannot speak any Gaelic, while around a quarter (24%) can speak the odd word. There are 4% that reported to be able to speak a few simple sentences in Gaelic, while 2% can speak at least parts of conversations or speak fluently.

There was thus an increase over time in the number of people being able to speak some level of Gaelic. The proportion of those that can speak at least the odd word of Gaelic has increased twofold from 15% to 30% within this decade from 2012 to 2021. However, the proportion of fluent or almost fluent Gaelic speakers remained relatively unchanged with less than 0.5% reporting being able to speak most or all conversations in Gaelic in 2012 and 2021.

## How does this vary by sub-groups?

The proportion of those who can or cannot speak Gaelic varies when examined by specific characteristics. There is no statistically significant variation in Gaelic speaking by age, meanwhile, Gaelic speaking did vary by level of education, whether people speak another language in addition to English fluently and by past exposure to Gaelic during childhood and more recently in the media or online (including via apps).

Analysis highlights a relationship between a greater ability to speak Gaelic and higher levels of education. A higher proportion (8%) of those who hold at least a degree and 9% of those who hold Scottish Highers or equivalent can speak at least a few simple sentences, compared with only 2% of those with a Standard Grade-level qualification and 2% of those with no qualifications.

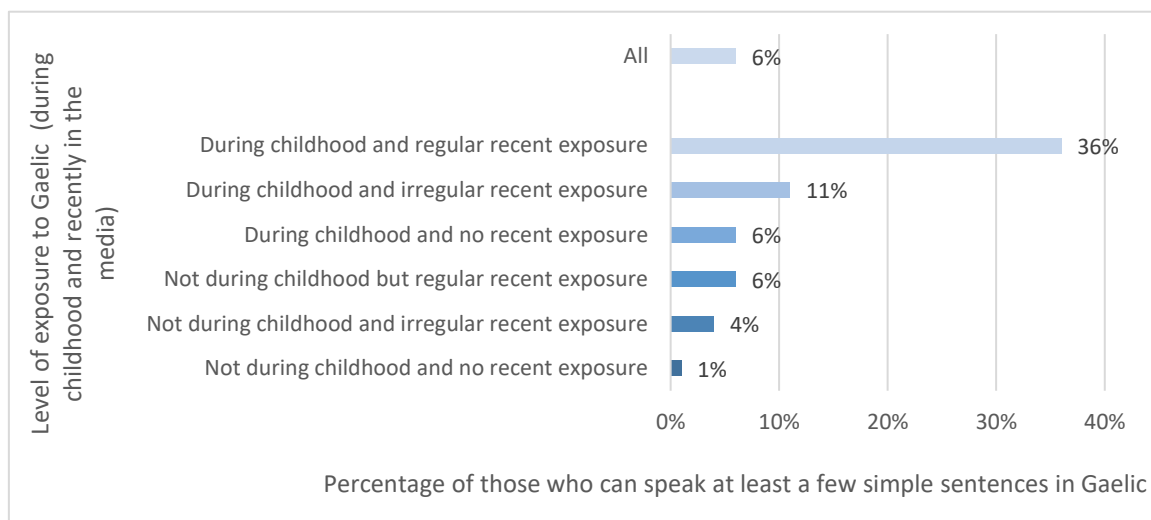
There is a significant relationship between those who can speak Gaelic and those who can fluently speak another language (other than English). 14% of those that can speak another language fluently report that they can speak at least a few simple sentences in Gaelic compared with 4% of those who cannot speak another language fluently.

Those who have been exposed to Gaelic speaking during childhood are six times more likely (18%) to be able to speak at least a few sentences of Gaelic than those who were not (3%). There is also an association between recent exposure to Gaelic (over the last 12 months on TV, radio, online or through apps) and reported knowledge of Gaelic.

Over a third (31%) of those who have been exposed to Gaelic in the media or online more than once a week recently are able to speak at least a few sentences of Gaelic compared with 6-7% of those who have been exposed to Gaelic between once a week and once a month in the media or online, 4% exposed to it less often than once a month and 1% never exposed to Gaelic in the media / online in the last 12 months.

The ability to speak Gaelic was also analysed by the combined measure of exposure to Gaelic. This combines exposure to Gaelic during childhood and exposure in the media or online in the last 12 months<sup>16</sup>. Those who have been exposed to Gaelic in childhood and regularly (at least once a week) in the media or via apps / online within the past 12 months are over three times as likely to have the ability to speak at least a few simple sentences of Gaelic (36%) than those who have been exposed to Gaelic during childhood but only irregularly (less than once a week) in the media recently (11%). Those not exposed to Gaelic during childhood nor in the media / online in the last 12 months are the least likely to be able to speak at least a few simple sentences of Gaelic (1%). This relationship between level of exposure and Gaelic speaking is shown in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: Proportion who can speak at least a few simple sentences of Gaelic by level of exposure to Gaelic



Base: All respondents

## 2.2 Understanding of Gaelic

All respondents were asked about their level of understanding of Gaelic. Table 2.2 summarises their responses.

<sup>16</sup> See Page 4 for more detailed on the combined measure of exposure to Gaelic

Table 2.2: 'Can you understand Gaelic, even if it's just the odd word?'

	2012	2021
	%*	%*
Not at all	75	59
The odd word	22	33
A few simple sentences	2	4
At least parts of conversations*	1	5
<i>Weighted base</i>	1229	1365
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1229	1365

Base: All respondents

\*This combines those who can understand parts of conversations, most and all conversations. Note that total figures for collapsed categories may differ by 1% in the table and the text due to rounding in tables to 0 decimal places.

All figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number. As a result, percentages might total 99% or 101%.

In 2021, 9% of adults in Scotland say that they understand at least a few simple sentences of Gaelic; 4% understand a few simple sentences and 5% at least parts of conversations (of which 4% understand parts of conversations and 1% all conversations). A little under 6 in 10 (59%) do not understand any Gaelic, while a third (33%) understand the odd word.

In line with Gaelic speaking, there was an increase in the proportion who can understand Gaelic between 2012 and 2021. The proportion of those that can understand at least the odd word of Gaelic has increased from 25% to 41% within this decade from 2012 to 2021. The proportion who do not understand any Gaelic has similarly decreased from 75% in 2012 to 59% in 2021.

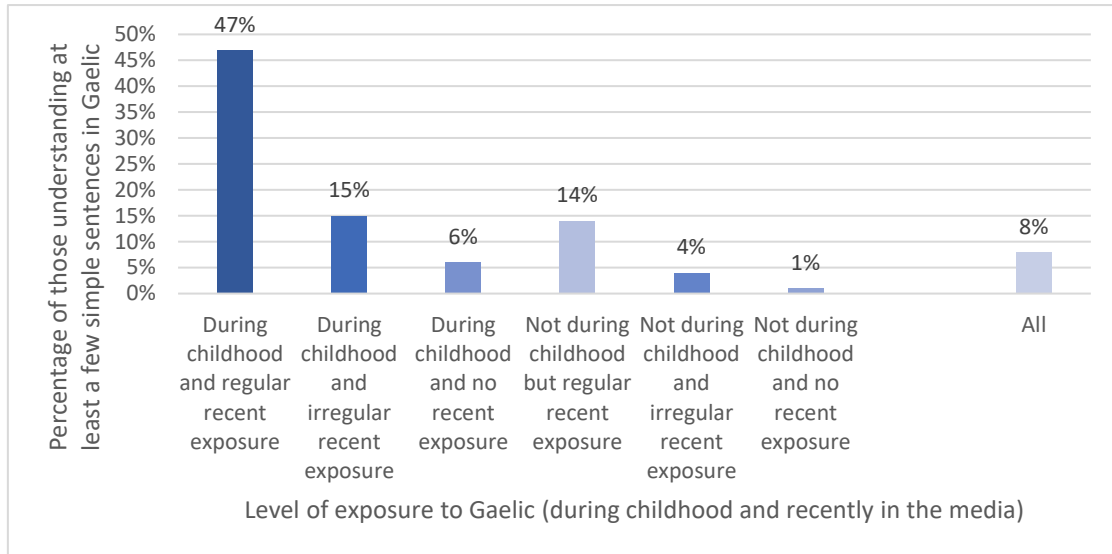
## How does this vary by sub-groups?

As with speaking Gaelic, there is no significant nor clear relationship between age and understanding of Gaelic, whilst understanding of Gaelic did vary by whether people speak another language other than English fluently, and by exposure to Gaelic in childhood and in the media / online in the last year.

There is a strong relationship between a higher level of understanding of Gaelic and being able to speak a language other than English. A higher proportion (16%) of those who can speak another language fluently can understand at least a few simple sentences of Gaelic compared with 7% of those who can only speak English fluently.

Over four times as many of those who had been exposed to Gaelic speaking in childhood (23%) are able to understand at least a few simple sentences than those who had not (5%). Similarly, when examining Gaelic understanding by the combined indicator of exposure to Gaelic during childhood and within the last 12 months via the media or via apps / online, an understanding of Gaelic was strongly associated with greater exposure (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2: Proportion who can understand Gaelic by level of exposure to Gaelic



Base: All respondents

Those exposed to Gaelic during childhood and regularly (at least once a week) in the media / online in the last 12 months are the most likely to be able to understand at least a few simple sentences of Gaelic (47%) compared with 15% exposed to Gaelic during childhood but irregularly through the media in the last 12 months and only 1% of those not exposed during childhood nor recently in the media / online.

## 2.3 Overall knowledge of Gaelic

In order to analyse further the level of Gaelic linguistic knowledge in Scotland, respondents' reported ability to speak and understand Gaelic were combined into one single measure.

43% speak or understand at least the odd word of Gaelic, of which 34% speak or understand only the odd word and 9% speak or understand at least a few simple sentences. These findings are summarised in Table 2.3 below.



Table 2.3: Single measure of knowledge of Gaelic

	2012	2021
	%	%
Does not speak or understand any Gaelic	74	57
Speaks or understands only the odd word of Gaelic	24	34
Speaks or understands at least a few simple sentences of Gaelic	3	9
<i>Weighted base</i>	1227	1365
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1228	1364

Base: All respondents

The proportion of those who can speak or understand at least a few simple sentences of Gaelic has increased three-fold from 3% to 9% since 2012. Similarly, there is an increase in the proportion of adults who can speak or understand only the odd word of Gaelic from 24% in 2012 to 34% in 2021.

### How does this vary by sub-groups?

As with understanding and speaking of Gaelic as individual variables, there was no consistent relationship between combined knowledge of Gaelic and age, whilst knowledge of Gaelic did differ by level of education. Half of those who hold at least a degree-level qualification (50%) and a similar proportion who hold at most a Higher or equivalent (48%) speak or understand at least the odd word of Gaelic. This is compared with 39% of those whose highest qualification is at Standard Grade level and 24% of those with no qualifications.

Knowledge of Gaelic did vary according to level of exposure to Gaelic as shown in Chapter 3.

## 2.4 Whether the public would like to be able to speak Gaelic better than they do now

As reported in earlier in this Chapter, less than 1% of respondents say that they are fluent in spoken Gaelic. The remainder were asked a follow-up question on whether they would like to be able to speak Gaelic better than they do now. This was the third question on Gaelic that the respondents were asked in the survey, after they were asked to classify their competence in understanding and in speaking Gaelic, and before any attitudinal questions about Gaelic. Responses are captured in Table 2.4.

Table 2.4 – ‘How much, if at all, would you like to be able to speak Gaelic better than you do now?’<sup>a</sup>

	%
A great deal	17
Somewhat	22
A little	26
Not at all	35
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>1364</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1364</i>

Base: all respondents who are not fluent Gaelic speakers

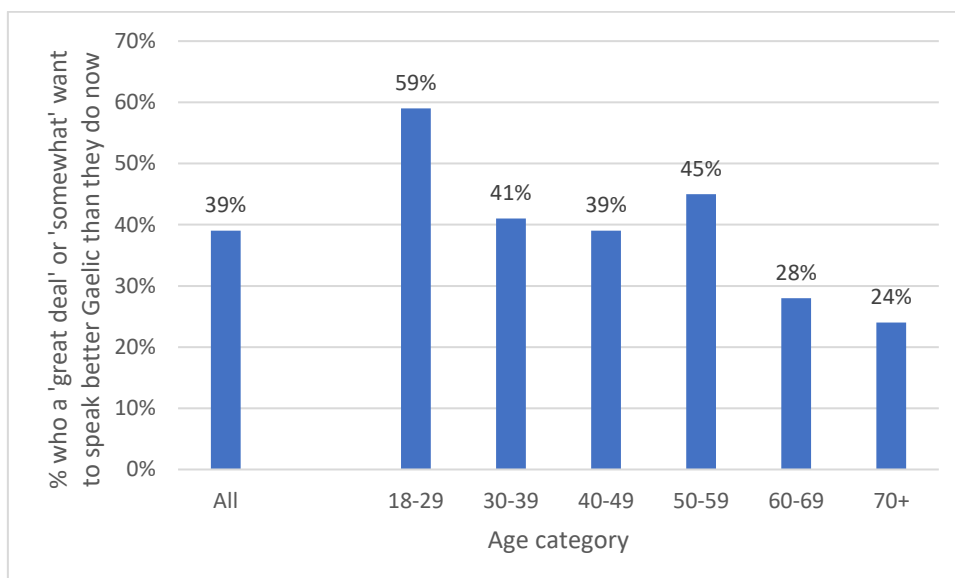
Just under two-thirds (65%) of adults demonstrate at least some interest in speaking Gaelic better than they do now. When asked how much they would like to speak Gaelic better than they do now, 17% say ‘a great deal’, whilst 22% say ‘somewhat’, and 26% ‘a little’. Over 3 in 10 (35%) adults do not want to speak Gaelic better at all.

### How does this vary by sub-groups?

There are differences in people’s desire to want to speak Gaelic better than they do now ‘a great deal’ or ‘somewhat’ according to age, knowledge of Gaelic and exposure to Gaelic.

As presented in Figure 2.3, 59% of those aged between 18-29 want to speak Gaelic better than they do now ‘a great deal’ or ‘somewhat’, compared with 28% of those aged 60-69 and 24% of those aged 70 and over.

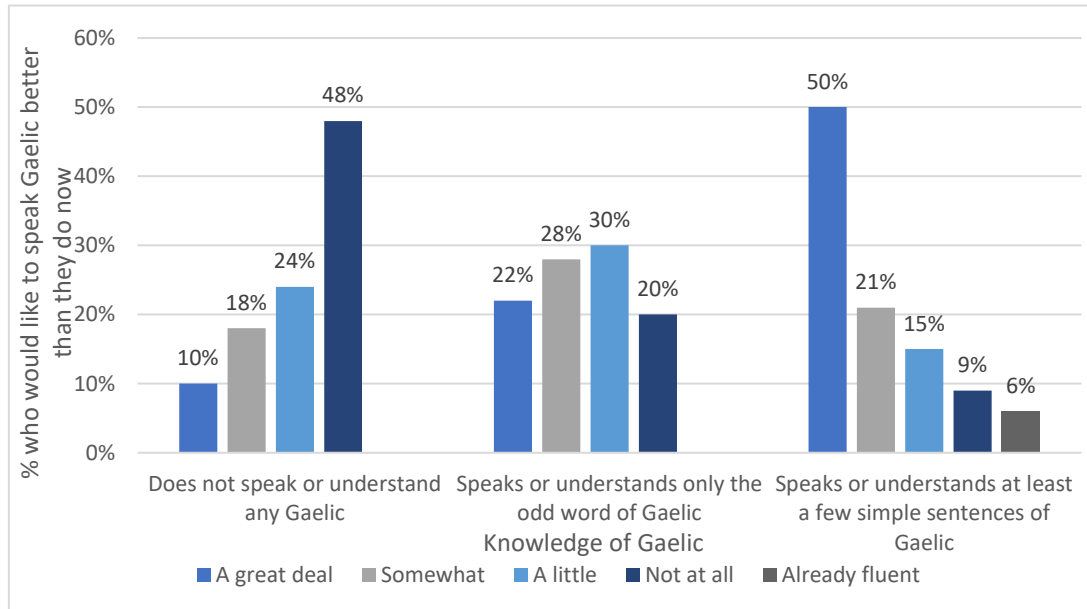
Figure 2.3 - Proportion who want a ‘great deal’ or ‘somewhat’ to speak Gaelic better than they do now’ by age group



Base: All respondents

As illustrated in Figure 2.4, those with greater knowledge of Gaelic are more likely to want to speak Gaelic better than they do now. 7 in 10 (71%) adults who speak or understand at least a few simple sentences of Gaelic want to speak Gaelic express a greater desire to speak Gaelic better than they do now, selecting either ‘a great deal’ or ‘somewhat’, compared with 28% of those who do not speak or understand any Gaelic.

Figure 2.4 – ‘How much, if at all, would you like to be able to speak Gaelic better than you do now?’ by knowledge of Gaelic



Base: All respondents

As may be expected, those who were exposed to Gaelic during childhood are more likely to report a desire to speak Gaelic better than they do now. Around two-thirds of those (67%) who have heard Gaelic spoken in childhood say that they want to speak Gaelic a great deal or somewhat better than they do now compared with a third (33%) of those who have not.

Exposure to Gaelic road, street and public signs is also associated with a greater desire to learn to speak the language better. Those exposed to road / public signs more than once a week are more likely to say they want to speak Gaelic better (selecting one of the ‘a great deal’ or ‘somewhat’ categories) (47%) than those never exposed to road signs (31%).

Furthermore, the more people have been exposed to Gaelic in the media and / or online in the last 12 months the more likely they are to want to speak Gaelic better than they do now. 6 in 10 (60%) of those who have been exposed more than once a week say they want to speak Gaelic ‘a great deal’ or ‘somewhat’ better than they do now. This compares with 52% of those exposed to Gaelic in the media about once a week, 49% of those exposed less than once a week but more than once a month, 39% of those exposed less than once a month and 23% of those who are never exposed to it. The direction of this association between knowledge of Gaelic and exposure to it is unclear. Exposure to Gaelic in the media and online is an active engagement with the language, however, it may be that people are engaging with these sources in order to actively improve their Gaelic.

---

## 3 Exposure to Gaelic

This chapter considers respondents' level of exposure to Gaelic in childhood and in the present day (within the last 12 months). Specifically, the chapter outlines the extent to which people across Scotland have been exposed to Gaelic:

- In childhood: Whether they heard Gaelic being spoken when they were a child, either at home or among the wider family or community (Yes or No)
- In the media or online: During the last 12 months, how often have they heard, read or seen Gaelic on TV, radio, online or through apps<sup>17</sup>
- In public life: During the last 12 months, how often have they seen Gaelic used on road, street, or other public signs<sup>18</sup>

Sub-group analysis is presented for each of these questions, to explore whether exposure is associated with demographic variables of sex, age, highest level of education, household income (monthly equivalised), economic status, fluency in another language in addition to English, and knowledge of Gaelic.

Questions on exposure to Gaelic were also asked on SSA 2012, and thus this chapter also compares reported levels of exposure to Gaelic in childhood, in the media and in public life over time, between 2012 and 2021. The questions on exposure to Gaelic in childhood and in public life were identical in 2012 and 2021, but the media question was extended from just TV and radio to include exposure to Gaelic online or through apps, due to the increase in availability of Gaelic content online and in apps such as Duolingo over the last 10 years.

This chapter presents information about the levels of exposure to Gaelic people in Scotland reported, and what demographic factors are associated with this. Later chapters (chapters 4-9) will explore associations of extent of exposure to Gaelic with attitudes to Gaelic and its use in public life.

### 3.1 Exposure to Gaelic in childhood

All respondents were asked about their level of exposure to Gaelic in childhood. The findings are presented in Table 3.1 below.

---

<sup>17</sup> The response options for these questions were: More than once a week, About once a week, Less than once a week but at least once a month, Less often than once a month or Never.

Table 3.1: 'Did you ever hear Gaelic being spoken when you were a child, either at home or among your wider family or community?'

	2012	2021
	%	%
Yes	16	19
No	84	81
<i>Weighted base</i>	1229	1365
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1229	1365

Base: All respondents

Just under a fifth (19%) of respondents in 2021 reported that they had heard Gaelic spoken in childhood which is a little lower than the 16% who had heard the language spoken as a child in 2012, however this apparent change is not statistically significant.

### How does this vary by sub-groups?

Whether people had been exposed to Gaelic in childhood varies with respect to age, ability to speak another language and is associated with knowledge of Gaelic.

Those who are under the age of 50 are more likely to have heard Gaelic being spoken during their childhood. Just over 2 in 10 of those aged 18-29 (22%) and around a quarter of those aged 30-39 (24%) and 40-49 (24%), state that they had heard Gaelic being spoken as a child compared with 19% of 50-59-year-olds, 14% of 60-69-year-olds, and 12% of 70+ year-olds.

The ability to speak another language fluently is related to lower levels of exposure to Gaelic in childhood. Only 12% of those who can speak a language other than English had heard spoken Gaelic during their childhood compared with 21% of those who do not speak another language other than English.

Those who have been exposed to Gaelic in childhood are more likely to speak or understand the odd word of Gaelic (45%) or at least a few simple sentences (24%) compared with those who have not (31% and 5%). This relationship is shown in Table 3.2 below (and the full break down by knowledge of Gaelic in Annex Table 2.5).

Table 3.2: Relationship between exposure to Gaelic in childhood and knowledge of Gaelic

	Exposed to Gaelic during childhood	Not exposed to Gaelic during childhood
	%	%
Does not speak or understand any Gaelic	31	64
Speaks or understands the odd word of Gaelic	45	31
Speaks or understands at least a few simple sentences	24	5
<i>Weighted base</i>	260	1103
<i>Unweighted base</i>	239	1125

Base: All respondents

## 3.2 Exposure to Gaelic in the media

Alongside measuring the level of exposure to Gaelic in childhood, respondents were also asked how often they had heard Gaelic in the past 12 months, through the media (TV and radio) or via apps or online. The results are summarised in Table 3.3 below.

Table 3.3: 'During the last 12 months, how often have you heard, read or seen Gaelic on TV, radio, online or through apps?'

	2012*	2021
	%	%
More than once a week	10	8
About once a week	13	12
Less than once a week but at least once a month	16	16
Less often than once a month	31	34
Never	30	30
<i>Weighted base</i>	1229	1364
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1229	1365

Base: All respondents

\* In 2012, respondents were asked how often they had heard Gaelic on TV and the radio in the past 12 months (online and apps were not mentioned).

7 in 10 (70%) have heard, read or seen Gaelic in the media or via apps / online over the last 12 months. Of these 8% have been exposed to it in this way more than once a

---

week in the last 12 months, 12% about once a week, 16% less than once a week but at least once a month and 34% less often than once a month.

There has been little discernible change in the pattern of exposure to Gaelic via the media, apps or online since 2012, although this comparison is limited due to the difference in question wording in 2012 (see note to Table 3.3). The overall proportion viewing, hearing or reading Gaelic within the last 12 months seems to have remained the same since 2012 at 70%. However, the proportion exposed to Gaelic in this way more than once a week has slightly decreased, though not significantly, from 10% to 8%.

## How does this vary by sub-groups?

There are differences in the level of recent exposure to Gaelic in the media and via apps / online according to sex, age, ability to speak another language and ability to speak Gaelic.

Men are more likely than women to have heard, read or seen Gaelic in the media in the past 12 months with 74% of men stating they have heard or read the language during this time compared with 67% of women.

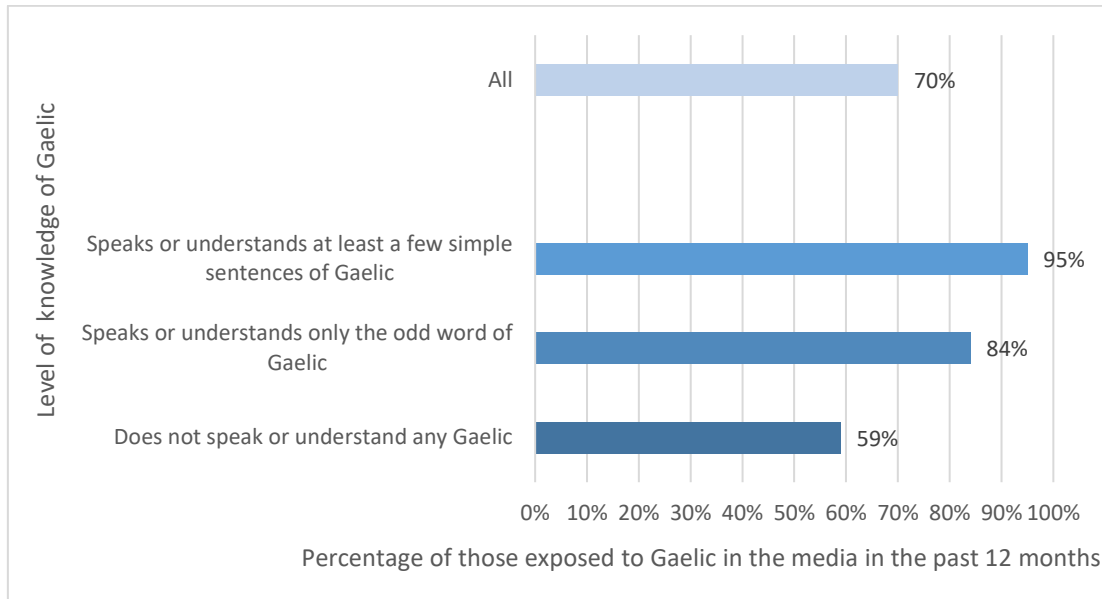
There are also differences by age, although the pattern is unclear and non-linear. Those aged 30-59 are most likely to have been exposed to Gaelic in the last 12 months (ranging from 73% among those aged 40-49 to 78% among those aged 30-39) than those in the youngest (18-29 years) and oldest age groups (60+) (ranging from 60% to 68%).

There is also variation in recent exposure to Gaelic via media or online in respect of respondents' knowledge of Gaelic and their ability to speak another language. Those who can speak a language other than English fluently are less likely to have been exposed to Gaelic through the media or online in the past 12 months. Nearly 6 in 10 (59%) of those who can speak another language have been exposed to Gaelic in the media in the past year, compared with 73% of people who can only speak English.

Unsurprisingly, there is a strong association between having greater knowledge of Gaelic and having been exposed to Gaelic through TV, radio, online and through apps in the past 12 months (Figure 3.1).



Figure 3.1: Proportion who have had any exposure to Gaelic in the media / online in the last 12 months by level of knowledge of Gaelic



Base: All respondents

Almost all of those (95%) who can speak or understand at least a few simple sentences in Gaelic have seen, heard or read the language through media or online / via apps in the past year. This is higher than the 84% of those who can speak or understand the odd word in Gaelic and the 59% of those who do not know any Gaelic.

### 3.3 Exposure to Gaelic in childhood and in the media or online in the last 12 months

Data collected about the level of exposure to Gaelic in childhood and through the media or online / via apps in the last 12 months were combined into one single measure of exposure to Gaelic. The combined findings can be seen in Table 3.4 below for 2012 and 2021.

Table 3.4: Combined measure of exposure to Gaelic

	2012*	2021
During childhood, and regular recent exposure (at least once a week)	5%	6%
During childhood, and irregular recent exposure (less than once a week)	8%	10%
During childhood, and no recent exposure	3%	3%
Not during childhood, but regular recent exposure (at least once a week)	17%	14%
Not during childhood, and irregular recent exposure (less than once a week)	39%	41%
Not during childhood, and no recent exposure	27%	26%
<i>Weighted base</i>	1226	1365
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1227	1364

Base: All respondents

\* In 2012, respondents were asked how often they had heard Gaelic on TV and the radio in the past 12 months (online and apps were not mentioned).

In 2021, 26% had not been exposed to Gaelic during childhood nor in the media or online in the last 12 months. This compares with 41% who have not been exposed to Gaelic during childhood but who have irregularly been exposed in the media / online recently, and 14% not exposed during childhood but regularly (at least once a week) in the media recently. Lesser proportions have been exposed to Gaelic during childhood - 6% of people have been exposed to Gaelic in childhood and have also been regularly exposed to the language in the media in the last 12 months, 10% have had irregular exposure in the media (less than once a week) and 3% not at all in this time.

There has been little change in the combined measure of childhood and recent media exposure to Gaelic since 2012, however the change to the wording of the question to include online exposure in 2021 limits comparability.

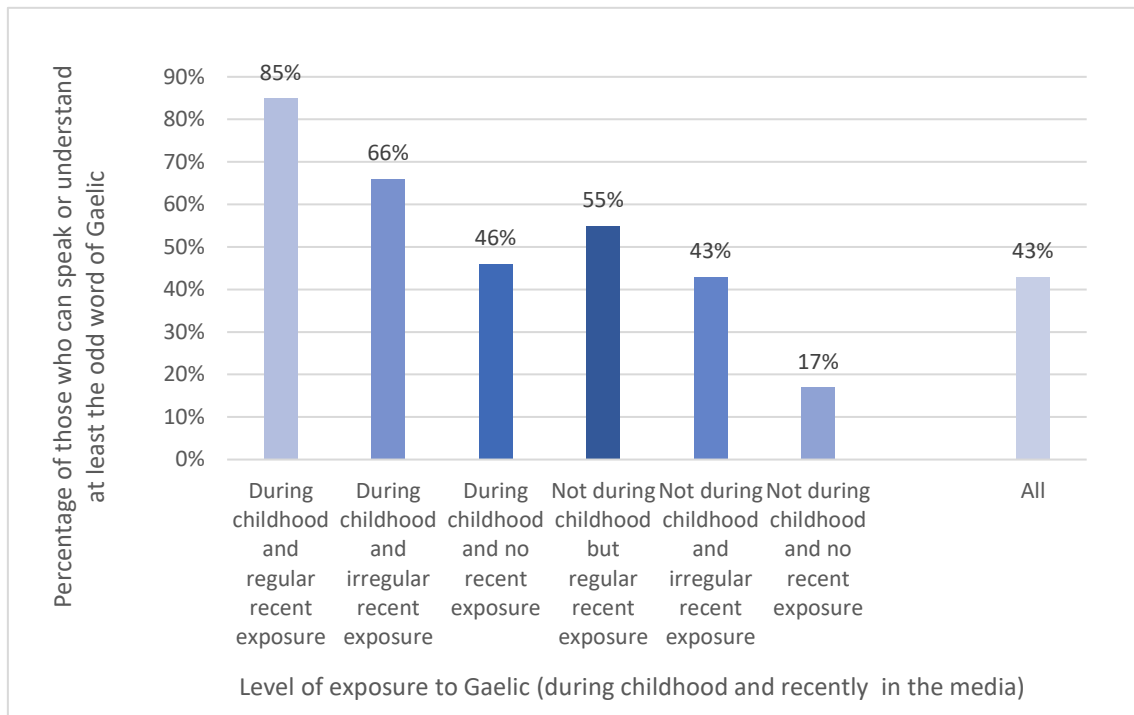
## How does this vary by sub-group?

There are fewer variations by sub-group in respect of the combined measure of exposure to Gaelic (during childhood and recently through the media or online) than there are for the two individual markers of exposure. There are variations in level of exposure according to level of income and knowledge of the language.

Those earning in the lowest household income bracket (£1000 or less per month) are most likely to have been exposed to Gaelic during childhood and regularly (at least once a week) in the media or online in the last 12 months (9%) compared with 6-8% of those in the two middle brackets (earning between £1001 to £2500 per month) and only 2% of those in the top bracket (earning more than £2500 per month).

Knowledge of Gaelic (understanding and / or speaking at least the odd word) varies significantly by level of exposure to it, both in childhood and in the media in the past 12 months. Figure 3.2 summarises the findings (see also Annex Table 2.5 for the full figures):

Figure 3.2: Proportion with some knowledge of Gaelic (speaking or understanding at least the odd word) by exposure to Gaelic



Base: All respondents

Among those who had the most exposure to Gaelic (during childhood and at least once a week from the media or online / via apps) 85% can speak or understand at least the odd word of Gaelic. This compares with 66% of those who had been exposed to Gaelic during childhood but irregularly (less than once a week) recently in the media / online. Among those not exposed to Gaelic in childhood 55% who are exposed to it regularly in the media can speak or understand at least the odd word compared with 43% exposed irregularly and 17% not exposed to it at all.

### 3.4 Exposure to Gaelic signs

Respondents were asked how often they have seen signs in Gaelic on road, street or other public signs in the past 12 months. The distribution of responses is shown in Table 3.5 below.

Table 3.5 'During the last 12 months, how often have you seen Gaelic used on road, street, or other public signs?'

	2012	2021
	%	%*
More than once a week	14	27
About once a week	5	15
Less than once a week but at least once a month	11	16
Less often than once a month	28	21
Never	42	22
<i>Weighted base</i>	1229	1364
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1229	1364

Base: All respondents

\*All figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number. As a result, percentages might total 99% or 101%

In 2021 around a quarter of the public (27%) have seen Gaelic signs more than once a week, while 15% have seen signs about once a week, 16% have seen them at least once a month, 21% less often than once a month and 22% have never seen them within the past 12 months.

The proportion of those who have been exposed to Gaelic signage more than once a week has nearly doubled, from 14% in 2012 to 27% in 2021, while the proportion who have never seen Gaelic signage in the past 12 months has decreased by 20 percentage points, from 42% in 2012 to 22% in 2021.

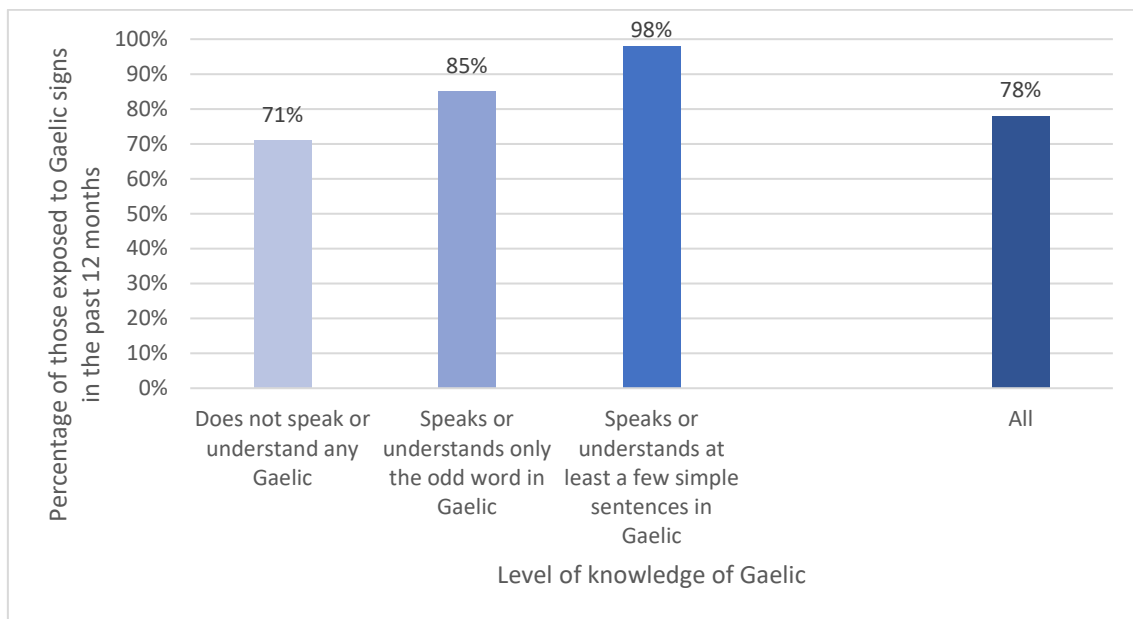
## How does this vary by sub-group?

There are several factors associated with being more likely to have seen Gaelic signage within the past 12 months. Men are more likely than women to report having seen Gaelic road, street or other public signs. A larger proportion (84%) of men have seen Gaelic signage in the past year compared with 73% of women.

Those with higher levels of education are more likely to have been exposed to Gaelic signage within the past 12 months. Among those who hold a degree or higher 86% had been exposed to Gaelic signs in the past 12 months compared with 82% of those who hold a Scottish Higher or equivalent, 65% of those who hold a qualification lower than Highers and 66% of those who hold no qualification.

As shown in Figure 3.3, greater knowledge of Gaelic is also associated with exposure to Gaelic signs.

Figure 3.3: Proportion exposed to Gaelic road, street or other public signs in the past 12 months by level of knowledge of Gaelic



Base: All respondents

Almost everyone (98%) who can speak or understand at least a few simple sentences in Gaelic has seen Gaelic signage in the past 12 months. This compares with 85% of those who can speak or understand only the odd word in Gaelic and 71% of those who do not understand any Gaelic.

There is also a strong association between exposure to Gaelic signage and exposure to Gaelic during childhood or in the media (including online / via apps) in the past 12 months. As shown in Table 3.6, 94% of those who have been exposed to Gaelic in childhood and regularly in the media / online in the past year have also seen Gaelic signage compared with 58% of those who have not heard Gaelic as a child and were not exposed to any Gaelic in the media / online in the past year.

Table 3.6 Exposure to Gaelic signage in the last 12 months by combined measure of exposure in childhood and in the last 12 months in the media / online

	<b>During childhood and regular recent exposure</b>	<b>During childhood and irregular recent exposure</b>	<b>During childhood and no recent exposure</b>	<b>Not during childhood but regular recent exposure</b>	<b>Not during childhood and irregular recent exposure</b>	<b>Not during childhood and no recent exposure</b>
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Exposed to signage	94	86	64	91	84	58
Not exposed to signage	6	14	36	9	16	42
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>84</i>	<i>130</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>191</i>	<i>553</i>	<i>359</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>88</i>	<i>114</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>231</i>	<i>582</i>	<i>311</i>

Base: All respondents

---

## 4 Attitudes to Gaelic speaking and Gaelic signage

This chapter examines the public's reported level of comfort when hearing Gaelic spoken and their attitudes towards Gaelic signage. Respondents were asked to report their:

- Level of comfort when hearing people in Scotland speaking to each other in Gaelic (on a five-point scale from very comfortable to very uncomfortable), and their
- Views on whether road, street and other public signs should be (i) in Gaelic as well as English across Scotland, (ii) in Gaelic as well as English where Gaelic is spoken<sup>18</sup> or (iii) in English only

These questions were designed to index the extent to which the public view Gaelic to be an accepted and normalised part of the linguistic soundscape and linguistic landscape in Scotland, and provide data on the success of initiatives to increase the use and visibility of Gaelic in order to 'secure the status of Gaelic as an official language of Scotland, commanding equal respect as the English language' (Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005).<sup>b</sup> Such initiatives have been facilitated by means of a language planning mechanism established by the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 – whereby Bòrd na Gàidhlig can require public bodies to plan for the increased visibility and use of Gaelic in the exercise of their functions. Between 2005 and 2021, language plans were prepared by 60 bodies (with 25 public bodies preparing these between 2005 and 2012 and a further 35 developing these between 2013 and 2021). A range of bodies have produced Gaelic language plans, including the Scottish Government, Scottish Parliament, Police Scotland, Visit Scotland, National Parks and the majority of Scottish local authorities. These have served to increase the visibility of Gaelic on public signage, on logos, and in public information, and have increased opportunities for Gaelic language use in these public services. In addition, some private franchises offering a public service also choose to use Gaelic-English bilingual signage – for example supermarkets, banks and restaurants (particularly in the most densely Gaelic-speaking areas of the North West of Scotland).

The questions were included in the 2012 and 2021 Scottish Social Attitudes Surveys, and this chapter will explore how public attitudes to hearing and seeing Gaelic in Scotland differ between different demographic groups and how they have changed over the past decade.

Sub-group analysis is presented for each of these questions, to explore whether these attitudes are associated with the demographic variables of sex, age, highest level of education, household income (monthly equivalised), economic status, fluency in another language in addition to English, knowledge of Gaelic and exposure to Gaelic (during childhood and weekly in the media / online in the last 12 months). In addition views on Gaelic signage was analysed by level of exposure to Gaelic road, street and public signs in the last 12 months and by views on hearing people in Scotland speaking to each other in Gaelic.

---

<sup>18</sup> No definitions were provided of where Gaelic 'is spoken.' The question aimed to index whether or not the respondent felt that Gaelic should be included on road, street or other public signage, and if so, whether they felt that its inclusion should be national in scope, or whether it should solely be used in areas where there are particular densities of Gaelic speakers, for example.



## 4.1 Attitudes towards hearing people speak Gaelic

To gauge reactions to hearing people speak Gaelic in Scotland, people were asked to describe how they feel when Gaelic is spoken on a five-point scale ranging from 'Very comfortable' to 'Very uncomfortable'. The results are summarised in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: 'How do you feel when you hear people in Scotland speaking to each other in Gaelic?'

	2012	2021
	%	%**
Very comfortable	19	23
Comfortable	28	21
Neither	42	37
Uncomfortable	5	4
Very uncomfortable	0	1
Never heard this language spoken	6	13
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1163	1365
<i>Weighted base</i>	1156	1365

\*All figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number. As a result, percentages might total 99% or 101%

In general, people are more likely to feel comfortable than uncomfortable with hearing Gaelic being spoken in Scotland.

While 44% say they feel either 'very comfortable' (23%) or 'comfortable' (21%), very few (5%) describe themselves as being either 'uncomfortable' (4%) or 'very uncomfortable' (1%). Under 1 in 10 (37%) people describe themselves as 'neither comfortable nor uncomfortable' while a little over 1 in 10 (13%) say they have never heard Gaelic spoken before. These findings reflect comfort or indifference about hearing the Gaelic language spoken, with very little reported discomfort, reflecting a normalisation of the use of Gaelic in the linguistic soundscape of Scotland.

There has been little change in the proportion of people saying they feel either 'comfortable' or 'very comfortable' hearing Gaelic being spoken. This figure has decreased by 3 percentage points in the preceding decade from 47% in 2012 to 44% in 2021 which was a significant change. Meanwhile, the proportion of people who say they have never heard Gaelic being spoken has increased by 7 percentage points in this time, from just 6% in 2012 to 13% in 2021.

### How does this vary by sub-groups?

Those with a higher level of education are more likely than their counterparts to say they feel comfortable hearing Gaelic spoken. As Table 4.2 shows, while 5 in 10 (50%) of those with a degree or higher say they feel either 'comfortable' or 'very comfortable'

hearing people speak to each other in Gaelic, only 3 in 10 (30%) of those with no qualifications report this.

Table 4.2 'How do you feel when you hear people in Scotland speaking to each other in Gaelic?' by level of education

	Degree / HE	Highers / A- Levels	Standards / GCSEs	Other Quals	No Quals	Total
	%*	%*	%*	%*	%*	%*
Very comfortable / comfortable	50	49	41	26	30	45
Neither	31	39	42	54	39	37
Uncomfortable / very uncomfortable	5	2	6	12	9	5
Never heard this language spoken	14	9	11	8	22	13
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>704</i>	<i>271</i>	<i>205</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>128</i>	<i>1365</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>586</i>	<i>283</i>	<i>265</i>	<i>52</i>	<i>176</i>	<i>1365</i>

Base: All respondents

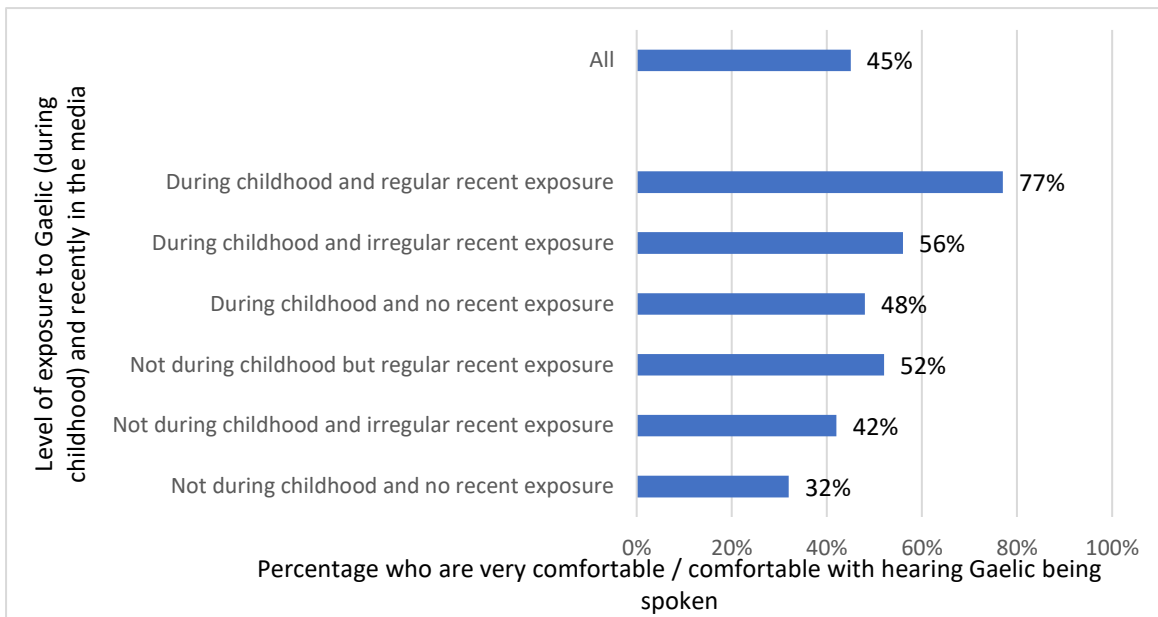
\*All figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number. As a result, percentages might total 99% or 101%.

Unsurprisingly, there is also a clear relationship between the feelings people have when hearing Gaelic being spoken and their level of ability in speaking and understanding the language. Almost 8 in 10 (77%) of those who can speak or understand at least a few simple sentences in Gaelic feel either 'comfortable' or 'very comfortable' when hearing it being spoken, compared with just over 3 in 10 (32%) of those who do not speak or understand Gaelic at all. In this latter group, the majority (62%) report either that they feel 'neither comfortable nor uncomfortable' (42%) with hearing Gaelic being spoken or they have never heard the language being spoken (20%) compared with only 6% who feel uncomfortable or very uncomfortable.

How people feel when hearing Gaelic spoken is also related to their exposure to the language – the more exposure someone has the more likely they are to say they feel comfortable when hearing people speak it. This relationship is shown clearly in Figure 4.1.

While almost 8 in 10 (77%) of those who were exposed to Gaelic in childhood and regularly (at least once a week) in the media or online in the last year feel either 'comfortable' or 'very comfortable' hearing it spoken, just over a third (32%) of those who were not exposed to it during childhood and not exposed to it at all in the media / online in the last year feel this way. In contrast, only 2% of those who were exposed to Gaelic in childhood and at least once a week in the media or online in the last year feel uncomfortable or very uncomfortable hearing Gaelic being spoken compared with 7% of those not exposed to Gaelic during childhood nor in the last year via the media or online.

Figure 4.1: Proportion of those who feel 'comfortable' or 'very comfortable' when hearing Gaelic spoken by exposure to Gaelic



Base: All respondents

## 4.2 Attitudes towards Gaelic signage

All respondents were asked for their views of the inclusion of Gaelic on road, street or other public signs in Scotland. Their responses are summarised in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 – ‘Which of the following best describes what you think about having road, street, or other public signs in Scotland in both Gaelic and English?’ (2012-2021)

	2012	2021
	%	%
Should be in Gaelic and English across Scotland	50	47
Should be in Gaelic and English where Gaelic is spoken	36	38
Should be in English only	14	15
<i>Weighted base</i>	1216	1359
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1216	1359

Base: All respondents

Almost half (47%) are in favour of bilingual road, street or other public signs across the country, while just under 4 in 10 (38%) think signage should be in Gaelic and English only in areas where Gaelic is spoken. Just 15% of people think signage in Scotland should only be in English.

Attitudes towards Gaelic signage in Scotland have remained relatively stable in the past decade. There has been no significant change during this time in the proportions who feel signage should be in Gaelic and English across Scotland, who say it should be in Gaelic and English only where Gaelic is spoken, or who believe that signage should only be in English.

### How does this vary by sub-groups?

Some groups of people are more likely to think that road, street or other public signs in Scotland should be bilingual. For example, younger adults are more likely than their older counterparts to think this should be the case. Almost 6 in 10 (59%) of those aged between 18-29 think signage should be in Gaelic and English across Scotland compared with just 34% of those aged 70 and over.

Those with a greater knowledge of Gaelic are more likely than their counterparts to think Gaelic signage should be bilingual. 7 in 10 (70%) of those who can speak or understand at least a few simple sentences in Gaelic think signage should be in Gaelic and English across Scotland and just over 4 in 10 (41%) of those who do not speak or understand any Gaelic think this should be the case.

Adults in Scotland who have seen Gaelic signage more often in the previous 12 months are more likely than others to think that signage should be bilingual across Scotland. Over 5 in 10 (54%) of those who have seen Gaelic signage more than once a week in the past 12 months think signage should be bilingual across Scotland, compared with under 4 in 10 (38%) of those who have never seen Gaelic signage in the past year.

Attitudes towards Gaelic signage are also related to people’s exposure to the language (see Table 4.4), both in their childhood and in their everyday life. Those who had been exposed to Gaelic during childhood and via the media or online / through apps at least once a week in the last year are more likely than those who had not to say that signage should be in Gaelic and English across Scotland (64% compared with 37%).

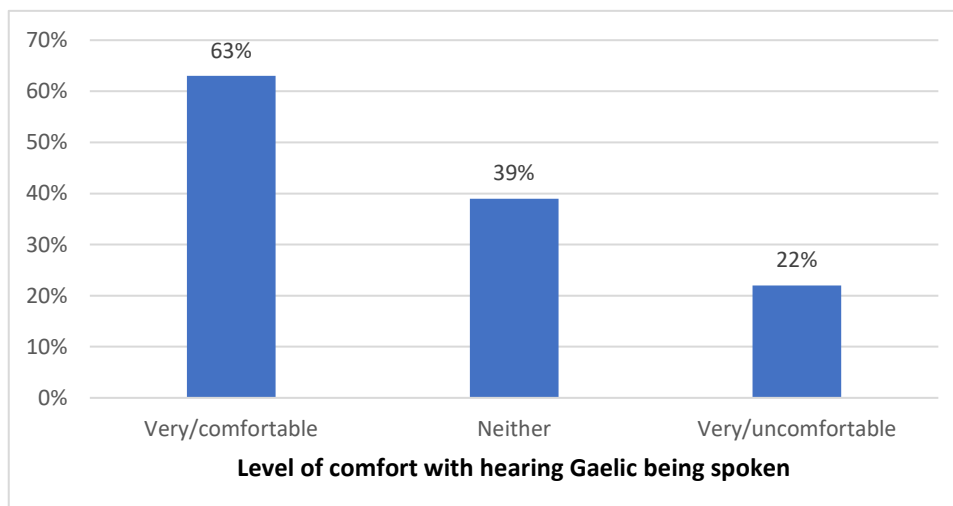
Table 4.4 Attitudes towards Gaelic signage by exposure to Gaelic

	During childhood, and regular recent exposure	During childhood, and irregular recent exposure	During childhood, and no recent exposure	Not during childhood, but regular recent exposure	Not during childhood, and irregular recent exposure	Not during childhood, and no recent exposure	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Should be in Gaelic and English across Scotland	64	58	56	54	45	37	47
Should be in Gaelic and English where Gaelic is spoken	33	37	22	37	42	37	38
Should be in English only	3	4	22	9	13	26	15
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>84</i>	<i>130</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>191</i>	<i>549</i>	<i>358</i>	<i>1359</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>88</i>	<i>113</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>231</i>	<i>580</i>	<i>309</i>	<i>1359</i>

Base: All respondents

Finally, as shown in Figure 4.2, attitudes towards Gaelic signage are related to feelings people have about hearing Gaelic being spoken. Over 6 in 10 (63%) of those who report feeling either comfortable or very comfortable when hearing people in Scotland speak to each other in Gaelic think that signage should be in Gaelic and English across Scotland, compared with around 2 in 10 (22%) of those who feel either uncomfortable or very uncomfortable hearing Gaelic being spoken.

Figure 4.2 – Proportion of those who think signage should be in Gaelic and English across Scotland by feelings on hearing Gaelic spoken



---

Base: All respondents

The sub-group analysis thus shows that (i) younger adults, (ii) those who have had childhood and / or recent media exposure to Gaelic, (iii) those with some knowledge of the Gaelic language, (iv) those comfortable when hearing Gaelic spoken and (v) those who have seen Gaelic signs regularly over the last year are more likely to believe that road, street and other public signs should be in Gaelic across Scotland. Such information may help to inform future public policy for Gaelic in Scotland.

---

## 5 Views on learning Gaelic

This chapter examines the public's views on learning Gaelic. It explores respondents' views of whether they perceive there to be intrinsic and instrumental reasons to learn Gaelic in addition to exploring whether people believe that learning Gaelic makes them more Scottish. These were reflected in questions that asked for respondents:

- Views on whether or not Gaelic gives someone a sense of achievement
- Views on whether or not Gaelic improves someone's chances of getting a job
- Views on whether or not learning Gaelic makes someone more Scottish.

Sub-group analysis is presented for each of these questions, to explore whether these attitudes are associated with the demographic variables of sex, age, highest level of education, household income (monthly equivalised), economic status, fluency in another language in addition to English, knowledge of Gaelic and exposure to Gaelic (during childhood and weekly in the media / online in the last 12 months).

These were new questions for the 2021 Survey, so no comparison of views across time is presented.

### 5.1 Whether learning Gaelic gives someone a sense of achievement and improves someone's chances of getting a job

All respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the following two statements:

- Learning Gaelic gives someone a sense of achievement and
- Learning Gaelic improves someone's chances of getting a job

Responses are summarised in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 – ‘How much do you agree or disagree that learning Gaelic...gives someone a sense of achievement / improves someone’s chances of getting a job?’

How much do you agree or disagree that...	...learning Gaelic gives someone a sense of achievement?	...learning Gaelic improves someone’s chances of getting a job?
	%	%
Agree Strongly	19	4
Agree	51	10
Neither agree nor disagree	23	45
Disagree	4	28
Disagree Strongly	3	14
<i>Weighted base</i>	1363	1361
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1362	1362

Base: All respondents

Adults in Scotland are most likely to agree or strongly agree (70%) that learning Gaelic gives someone a sense of achievement, whilst only 7% disagree or disagree strongly that learning Gaelic gives someone a sense of achievement. Around a quarter (23%) neither agree nor disagree.

Respondents are most likely to say they neither agree nor disagree (45%) that learning Gaelic improves someone’s chances of getting a job. 1 in 10 (10%) adults agree that learning Gaelic improves someone’s chances of getting a job, whilst almost 3 in 10 (28%) disagree.

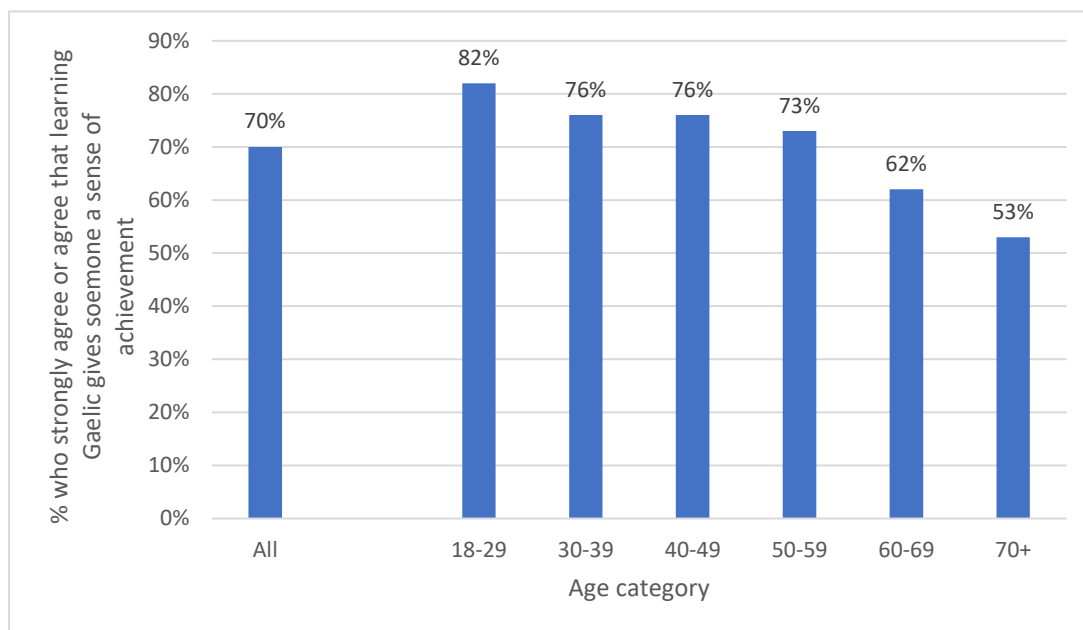
### How does this vary by sub-groups?

The extent to which adults agree that learning Gaelic gives someone a sense of achievement varies according to age, level of education, level of knowledge of Gaelic and level of exposure to Gaelic.

As shown in Figure 5.1, there is a clear relationship between age and agreement with whether learning Gaelic gives someone a sense of achievement. Just over 8 in 10 (82%) of those aged 18-29 either strongly agree or agree that learning Gaelic gives someone a sense of achievement, compared with around 5 in 10 (53%) of those aged 70 and over.



Figure 5.1 – Percentage who strongly agree or agree that learning Gaelic gives someone as sense of achievement by age group



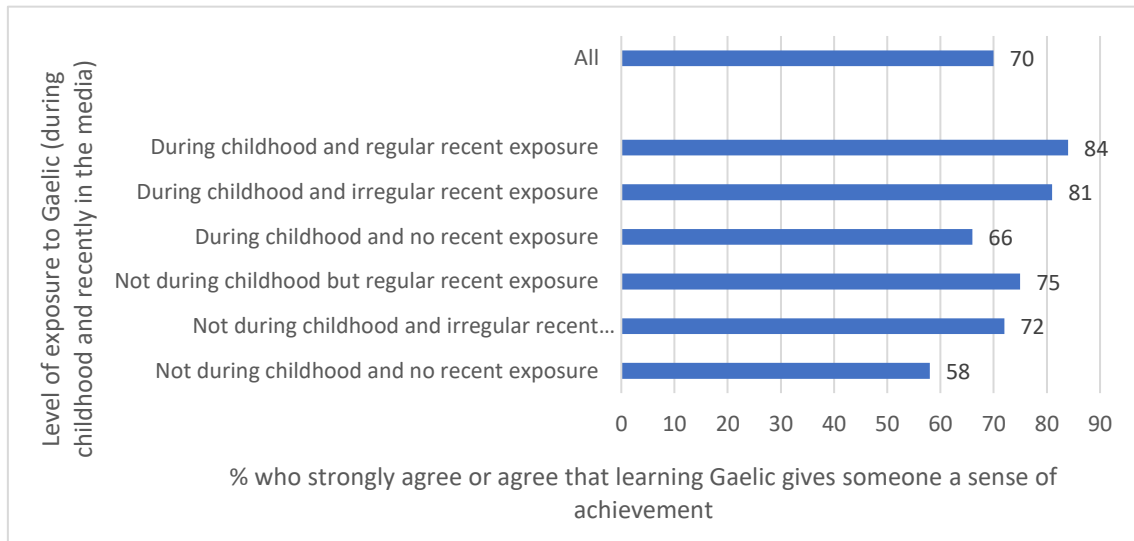
Base: All respondents

In general, those with a higher level of education are more likely to agree that learning Gaelic gives someone a sense of achievement. Over 7 in 10 (73%) of those with a degree / Higher Education or equivalent either strongly agree or agree that learning Gaelic gives someone a sense of achievement compared with 56% of those with no qualifications.

Furthermore, a greater knowledge of Gaelic is associated with a greater likelihood to agree that learning Gaelic gives someone a sense of achievement. 9 in 10 (90%) who speak or understand at least a few simple sentences of Gaelic either strongly agree or agree that learning Gaelic gives someone a sense of achievement, compared with just over 6 in 10 (61%) of those who do not speak or understand any Gaelic.

Unsurprisingly, a similar relationship is apparent between the level of exposure to Gaelic and agreement that learning Gaelic brings a sense of achievement. Over 8 in 10 (84%) of those exposed to Gaelic during childhood and in the media / online regularly (at least once a week) in the last year agree or strongly agree that learning Gaelic gives someone a sense of achievement. This compares with 58% of those who were neither exposed to Gaelic during childhood nor in the media in the last year (see Figure 5.2).

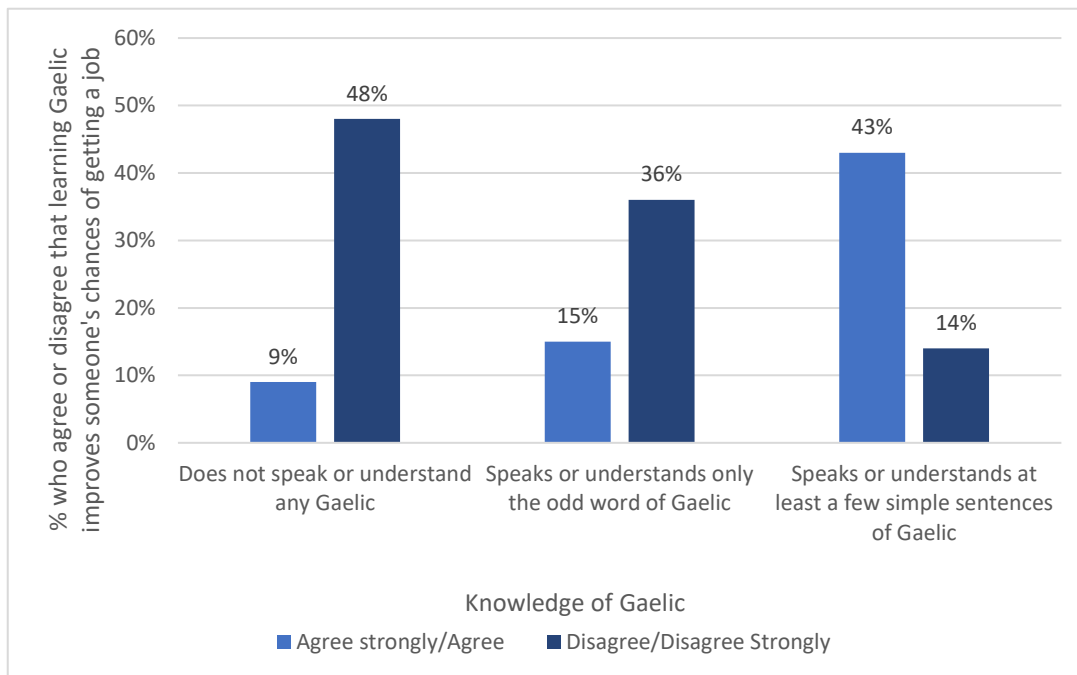
Figure 5.2 - Percentage who strongly agree or agree that learning Gaelic gives someone as sense of achievement by exposure to Gaelic during childhood and in the last 12 months via the media / online



Base: All respondents

Attitudes towards whether learning Gaelic improves someone's chances of getting a job vary most by knowledge of Gaelic and exposure to it. Those with greater knowledge of Gaelic are more likely than those with little or no understanding of the language to agree that learning Gaelic improves someone's chances of getting a job. As shown in Figure 5.3, over 4 in 10 (43%) of those who speak or understand at least a few simple sentences of Gaelic either strongly agree or agree that learning Gaelic improves someone's chances of getting a job, compared with just 1 in 10 (9%) of those who do not understand or speak Gaelic.

Figure 5.3 - 'How much do you agree or disagree that learning Gaelic improves someone's chances of getting a job?' by knowledge of Gaelic

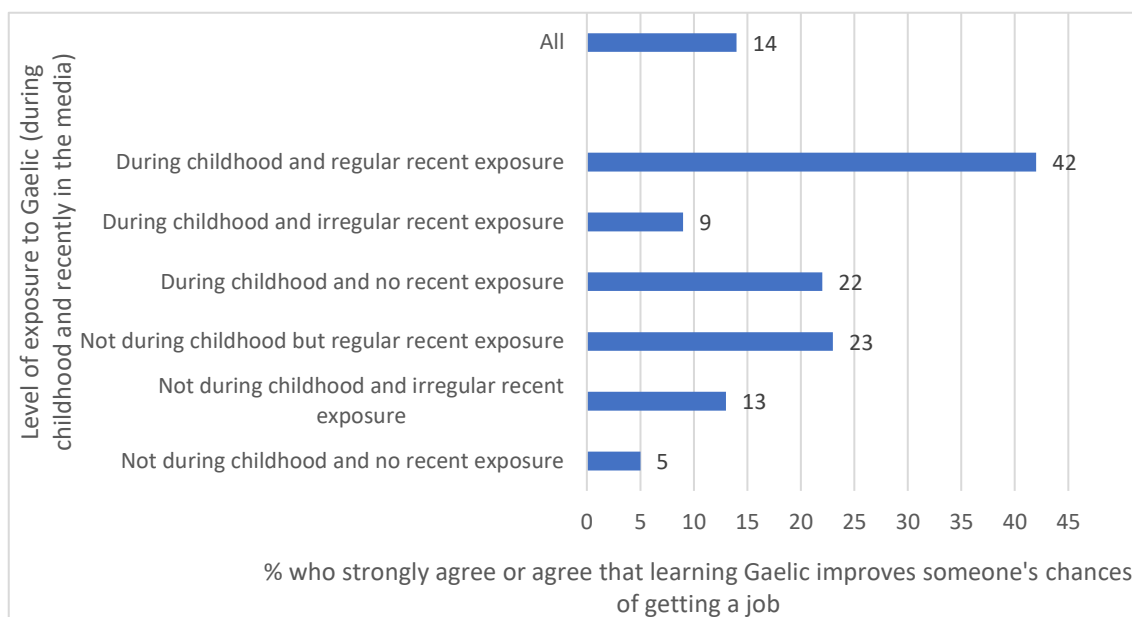


Base: All respondents

The youngest age category (18-29) are the most likely to agree or strongly agree that learning Gaelic improves someone's chances of getting a job. 23% percent of 18-29 year olds agree or strongly agree compared with 10% of 30-39-year-olds, 13% of 40-49-year-olds, 16% of 50-59-year-olds, 12% of 60-69-year-olds and 10% of 70+ year olds.

Exposure to Gaelic is also associated with agreeing that learning Gaelic improves someone's chances of getting a job. As shown in Table 5.4, over 4 in 10 (42%) who have been exposed to Gaelic during their childhood and regularly (at least once a week) recently in the media either strongly agree or agree that learning Gaelic improves someone's chances of getting a job, compared with 22% exposed to Gaelic during childhood but not in the media in the last year and 5% of those who have neither been exposed to it during childhood nor in the media / online in the last year.

Figure 5.4 – ‘How much do you agree or disagree that learning Gaelic improves someone’s chances of getting a job?’ by Exposure to Gaelic during childhood and in the last 12 months via the media / online



Base: All respondents

## 5.2 Attitudes towards whether learning Gaelic makes someone more Scottish

Respondents were asked how much they agreed or disagreed that learning Gaelic makes someone more Scottish. A higher proportion (44%) disagree with this than agree (23%) or neither agree nor disagree (33%).

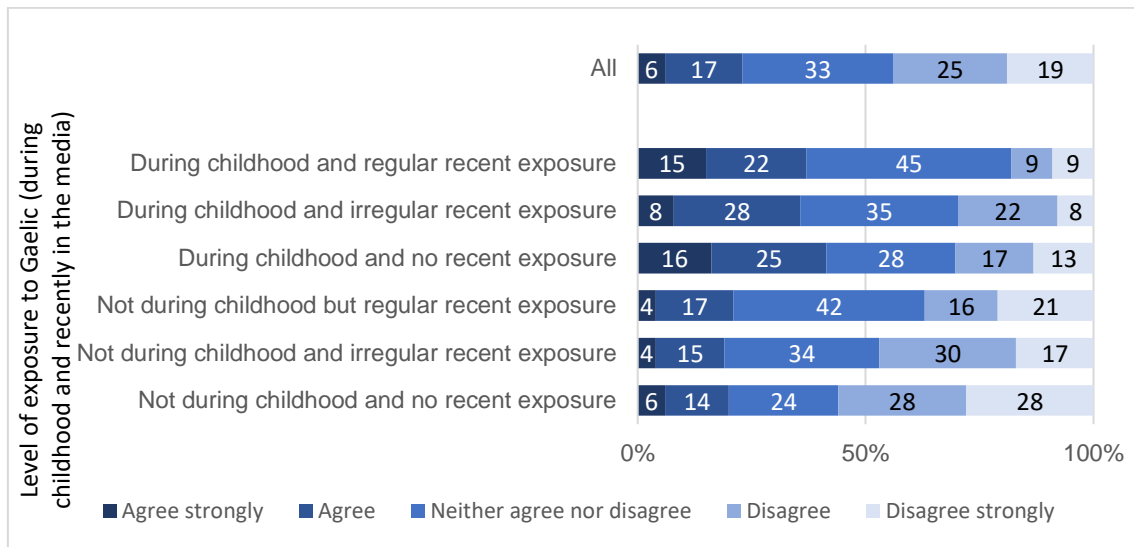
### How does this vary by sub-groups?

There are few significant differences between sub-groups in the proportion who agree or disagree with the statement that learning Gaelic makes someone more Scottish. Those who are fluent in a language other than English are more likely to agree (34%) than those who are not (21%).

Those who can speak or understand no more than the odd word of Gaelic are more likely than those who can speak or understand at least a few simple sentences to disagree (49% of those who cannot speak or understand any Gaelic and 41% who know only the odd word disagree that learning Gaelic makes someone more Scottish, compared with 29% of those who are more fluent).

Those with no or limited exposure to Gaelic, either through the media or during childhood, are more likely to disagree that learning Gaelic makes someone more Scottish. Over half (56%) of those with no exposure during childhood nor any through the media or online in the last year disagreed, compared with 18% with both childhood and regular current exposure, 3 in 10 (30%) of those who had childhood and irregular recent exposure to Gaelic in the media and 37-47% of those with other mixed exposure (see Figure 5.5). This difference in attitude seems to be driven mostly by exposure to Gaelic during childhood, with those who have been exposed to Gaelic during childhood nearly twice as likely to agree or strongly agree that learning Gaelic makes someone more Scottish compared with those who were not (37% compared with 19%).

Figure 5.5: Level of agreement that learning Gaelic makes someone more Scottish by level of exposure to Gaelic



Base: All respondents

## 6 Gaelic and cultural heritage

This chapter explores how important Gaelic is to the cultural heritage of individuals within Scotland, and how important the public think Gaelic is to the cultural heritage of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland (the most densely Gaelic-speaking areas in the North West of Scotland), and to Scotland as a whole. The findings cover:

- Views on the importance of Gaelic to one's own cultural heritage;
- Views on the importance of Gaelic to the cultural heritage of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland; and
- Views on the importance of Gaelic to Scotland's cultural heritage.

Sub-group analysis is presented for each of these questions, to explore whether these attitudes are associated with the demographic variables of sex, age, highest level of education, household income (monthly equivalised), economic status, fluency in another language in addition to English, knowledge of Gaelic and exposure to Gaelic (during childhood and weekly in the media / online in the last 12 months). In addition some of these attitudes were analysed by views on whether or not learning Gaelic makes someone more Scottish.

The first three questions were also asked in the 2012 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, and results from that survey are provided for comparison.

### 6.1 The importance of Gaelic to one's own cultural heritage

Respondents were asked how important Gaelic is to their own cultural heritage. Around a third (31%) say it is important, (of which 9% say very important and 22% fairly important), while 38% say it is not very important and 31% not important at all. There has been an increase in the proportion of people who believe Gaelic to be important to their own cultural heritage compared with 2012, when 26% said it was important (8% very important and 18% fairly important – see Table 6.1). There has also been a decrease in the proportion who say that Gaelic is 'not at all' important to their own cultural heritage, from 4 in 10 (40%) in 2012 to just over 3 in 10 (31%) in 2021.

Table 6.1: The importance of Gaelic to one's own cultural heritage

	2012	2021
	%*	%*
Very important	8	9
Fairly important	18	22
Not very important	35	38
Not at all important	40	31
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>1127</i>	<i>1360</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1137</i>	<i>1363</i>

---

Base: All respondents

\* All figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number. As a result, percentages might total 99% or 101%.

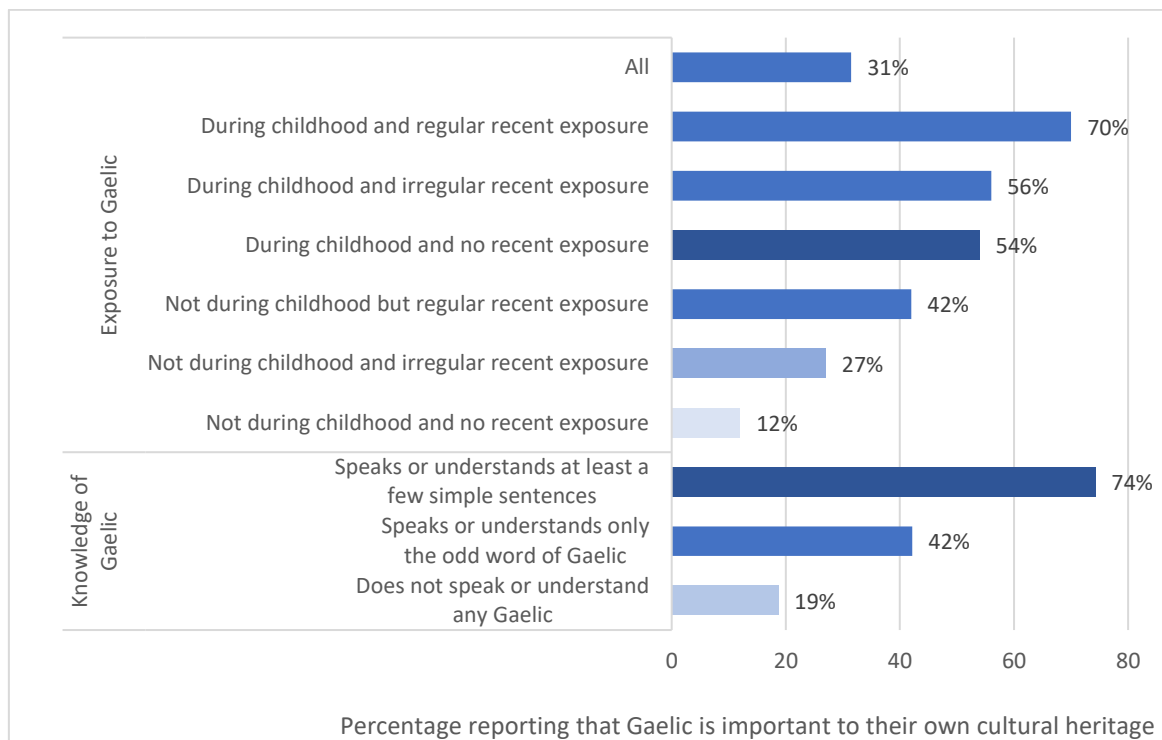
## How does this vary by sub-groups?

Views on the importance of Gaelic to one's own cultural heritage do not vary significantly in relation to demographic variables such as sex, age, level of education, household income or main economic activity. However, such views do vary significantly in relation to respondents' exposure to Gaelic and knowledge of Gaelic.

Figure 6.1 shows that around three quarters (74%) of those who can speak or understand at least a few simple sentences of Gaelic say that it is important to their own cultural heritage. 2 in 5 (42%) of those who can only speak or understand the odd word say it is important to them, while only 1 in 5 (19%) who can neither understand nor speak any Gaelic say it is important to their cultural heritage.

Exposure to Gaelic during childhood and in the media and online (combined) is associated with views on the importance of Gaelic to one's own cultural heritage. The majority (70%) of those who were exposed to Gaelic during their childhood, and regularly (at least once a week) exposed to Gaelic through the media or online over the last 12 months, say that Gaelic is important to their own cultural heritage. More than half (56%) of those who have been exposed during childhood but irregularly (less than once a week) recently in the media thought Gaelic important to them. In terms of those not exposed to Gaelic during childhood 42% who are currently exposed to Gaelic regularly in the media say Gaelic is important to their cultural heritage, while 27% who are currently exposed to it irregularly and 12% who were neither exposed to it during childhood nor at present say Gaelic is important to their cultural heritage.

Figure 6.1: The importance of Gaelic to one's own cultural heritage, by exposure to Gaelic and knowledge of Gaelic



Base: All respondents

## 6.2 The importance of Gaelic to the cultural heritage of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland

After being asked about the importance of Gaelic to their own cultural identity, respondents were asked how important they think Gaelic is to the cultural heritage of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. In 2021, the overwhelming majority (88%) believe it to be important, of which 47% say very important and 41% fairly important), while 8% think it not very important and 4% not important at all. These figures show no real change from 2012, when 90% thought Gaelic important to the Highlands and Islands (see Table 6.2).



Table 6.2: Public views on the importance of Gaelic to the cultural heritage of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland

	2012	2021
	%*	%*
Very important	51	47
Fairly important	40	41
Not very important	7	8
Not at all important	3	4
<i>Weighted base</i>	1130	1362
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1140	1362

Base: All respondents

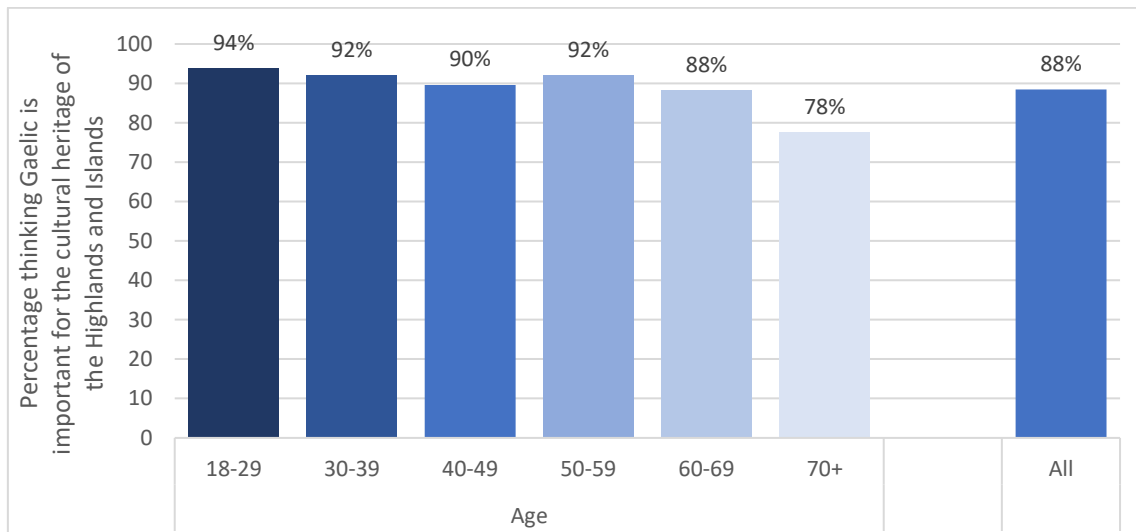
\* All figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number. As a result, percentages might total 99% or 101%.

### How does this vary by sub-groups?

Despite the high proportions viewing Gaelic as important to the cultural heritage of the Highlands and Islands, there are a number of differences by sub-group. There are differences with respect to age, exposure to Gaelic and knowledge of Gaelic and to the belief that learning Gaelic makes someone more Scottish.

As shown in Figure 6.2, those aged 70 and above are less likely than other adults to think Gaelic important to the Highlands and Islands (78%, compared with 88-94% of other age groups).

Figure 6.2: Public views on the importance of Gaelic to the cultural heritage of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, by age



Base: All respondents

Nearly all (98%) of those who speak or understand at least a few simple sentences of Gaelic think it important to the culture of the Highlands and Islands, as do 93% of those who speak or understand only the odd word and 84% of those who do not speak or understand any Gaelic.

Nearly all (97-99%) of those who were both exposed to Gaelic during childhood and either weekly or less regularly in the media or online in the last 12 months consider Gaelic important to the cultural heritage of the Highlands and Islands. Just over 9 in 10 (91%) of those exposed to Gaelic in childhood but not in the media / online still consider it important, which is the same as the proportion among those not exposed to it in childhood but who are currently exposed to it regularly in the media. Nearly 9 in 10 (88%) of those not exposed to Gaelic during childhood but exposed irregularly in the media at present and 83% not exposed to it in either way still think Gaelic to be important to the cultural heritage of the Highlands and Islands.

## 6.3 The importance of Gaelic to Scotland's cultural heritage

The third part of this sequence of questions asked how important the respondent thinks Gaelic is to the cultural heritage of Scotland.

79% of people think Gaelic is important to Scotland's cultural heritage (of which 34% say very important and 45% fairly important), while 15% think it not very important and 6% not at all important. These figures have not changed significantly since 2012, when 78% said that Gaelic was important to Scotland's cultural heritage (see Table 6.3).

Table 6.3: Thoughts on the importance of Gaelic to Scotland's cultural heritage

	2012	2021
	%	%
Very important	31	34
Fairly important	47	45
Not very important	17	15
Not at all important	4	6
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>1140</i>	<i>1364</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1145</i>	<i>1363</i>

Base: All respondents

### How does this vary by sub-groups?

Patterns of response to this question are very similar to those for the previous question, albeit with a slightly smaller proportion in each of the sub-groups saying that Gaelic is important to Scotland's cultural heritage than saying it is important to the cultural heritage of the Highlands and Islands.

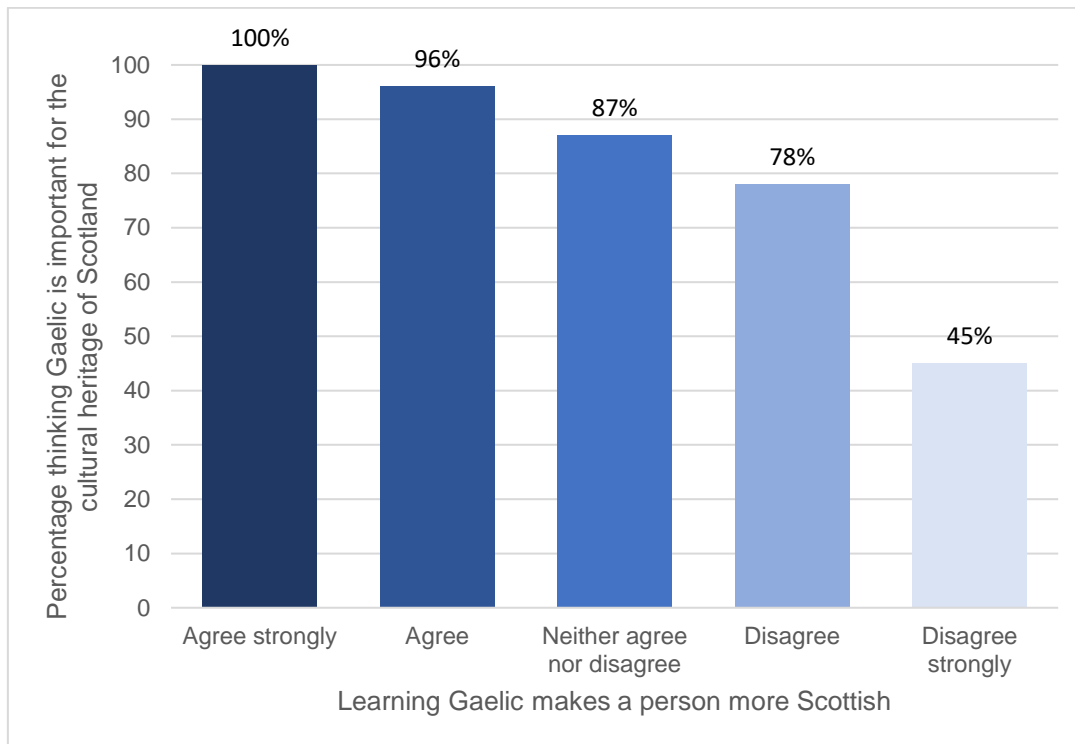
Older people are less likely to say Gaelic is important to Scotland's cultural heritage (60% of those aged 70 or above and 69% of those aged 60-69 say it is important, compared with 83-90% in each of the younger age groups).

Those who can speak or understand some Gaelic are more likely than those who cannot to say it is important to Scotland's cultural heritage (93% of those who can speak or understand at least a few sentences of Gaelic and 87% of those who only know the odd word, compared with 72% of those who cannot speak or understand any Gaelic).

Those who have not been exposed to Gaelic during childhood and are not exposed through the media / online in the last year are less likely than others to say it is important to Scotland's cultural heritage (68%, compared with 78-95% of others with greater exposure).

All (100%) of those who agree strongly that learning Gaelic makes a person more Scottish also think Gaelic is important to Scotland's cultural heritage. This proportion declined as the level of agreement declined, to 45% of those who disagree strongly that learning Gaelic makes a person more Scottish, as shown in Figure 6.3.

Figure 6.3: Public views on the importance of Gaelic to the cultural heritage of the Scotland, by views on whether learning Gaelic makes a person more Scottish



Base: All respondents

One difference from patterns for the previous question on importance of Gaelic to the cultural heritage of the Highlands and Islands, is that women are more likely than men to believe that Gaelic is important to Scotland (82%, compared with 75% of men).

---

## 7 Gaelic in education

This chapter explores attitudes to learning Gaelic at school. It explores attitudes to learning the Gaelic language, and Gaelic history and culture within all schools in Scotland, and also explores attitudes to Gaelic-medium education. The findings cover:

- The languages thought most important for children aged 5 to 15 in Scotland to study;
- Attitudes towards the teaching of the Gaelic language to all school pupils aged 5 to 15 in Scotland;
- Attitudes towards the teaching of Gaelic history and culture to all school pupils aged 5 to 15 in Scotland; and
- Attitudes towards having some primary schools in Scotland where all the teaching is in Gaelic rather than English (Gaelic-medium education), including whether such schools should be everywhere in Scotland, or only in places where Gaelic is widely spoken<sup>19</sup>.

Sub-group analysis is presented for each of these four topics, to explore whether these attitudes are associated with the demographic variables of sex, age, highest level of education, household income (monthly equivalised), economic status, fluency in another language in addition to English, knowledge of Gaelic and exposure to Gaelic (during childhood and weekly in the media / online in the last 12 months). In addition attitudes towards Gaelic-medium education and teaching of the Gaelic language to all children were analysed by whether people believe Gaelic is one of the two most important languages for children in Scotland to study, how important Gaelic is to their own cultural heritage and to that of Scotland and whether people believe learning Gaelic improves someone's chances of getting a job.

Attitudes towards the teaching of the Gaelic language to all pupils in Scotland between the ages of 5 and 15 were also explored in the 2012 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, and so comparisons of public views over time are also included below.

### 7.1 Languages thought most important to study

Following the launch of the 1+2 Languages Policy in Scotland in 2012<sup>c</sup>, all pupils in Scotland learn two additional languages between the ages of 5 and 15.

Respondents were asked which language they think is most important for children in Scotland aged 5 to 15 to study. They were provided with a list of seven languages to choose from (French, Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, Gaelic, Polish, German; in this order), with the option of specifying a language not on the list. Those who selected one of the seven languages were then asked which language they considered the second most important for children to study. Results are shown in Figure 7.1.

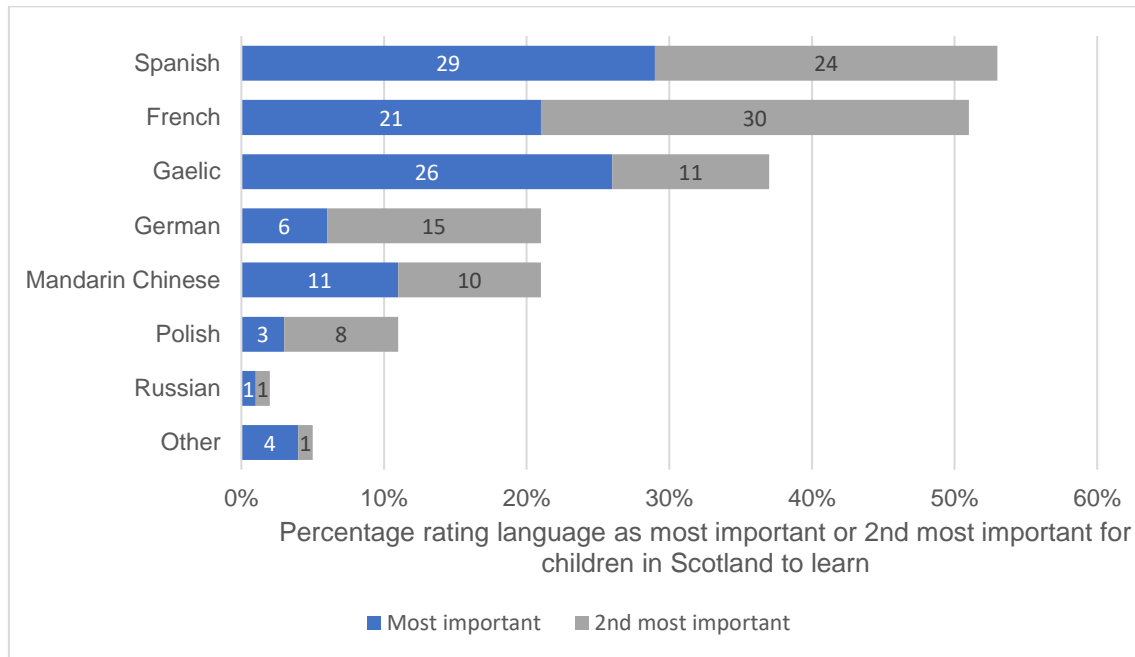
Gaelic is the second most commonly selected as the most important language for children to study, identified by 26%, behind only Spanish, which 29% view as most important. Taking into account both first and second preferences, Gaelic is the third most popular choice, with 37% putting this in their top two languages to be studied. Around half (53%) give Spanish as either their first or second choice, with a similar

---

<sup>19</sup> Gaelic-medium education is delivered both in wholly Gaelic-medium primary schools and within dual-stream schools where Gaelic-medium education is provided alongside English-medium education within the same school.

proportion choosing French (51%). Smaller proportions give German (21%), Mandarin Chinese (20%), Polish (11%), Russian (2%) or another language (5%).

Figure 7.1: Languages thought most important for children aged 5 to 15 in Scotland to study



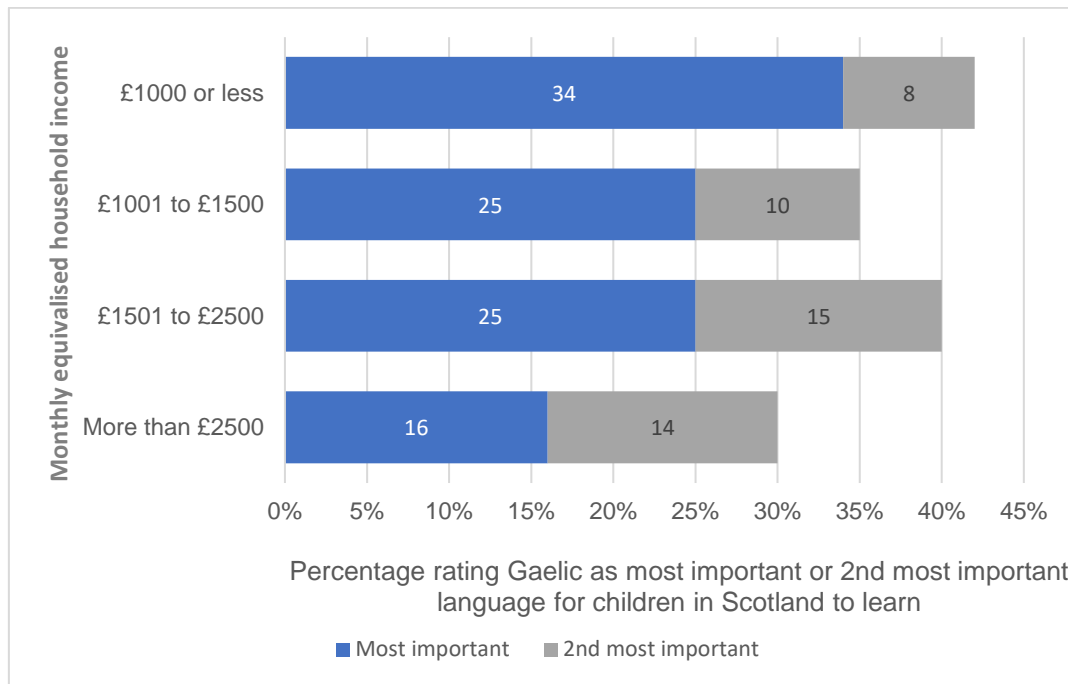
Base: All respondents (though those who chose “Other” for the most important were not asked for the second most important)

### How does this vary by sub-groups?

There are differences in the proportion who say that Gaelic is the most and second most important language for children to study by household income, level of knowledge of Gaelic and by exposure to Gaelic (during childhood and recently in the media).

There are differences by household income in the proportion who say that Gaelic is the most important language for children to study. As shown in Figure 7.2, a third (34%) of those in the lowest income group say that Gaelic is the most important language for children to study, more than for any other language. In the highest income group, this proportion is only 16%.

Figure 7.2: Whether Gaelic is one of the two most important languages for children aged 5 to 15 in Scotland to study, by household income

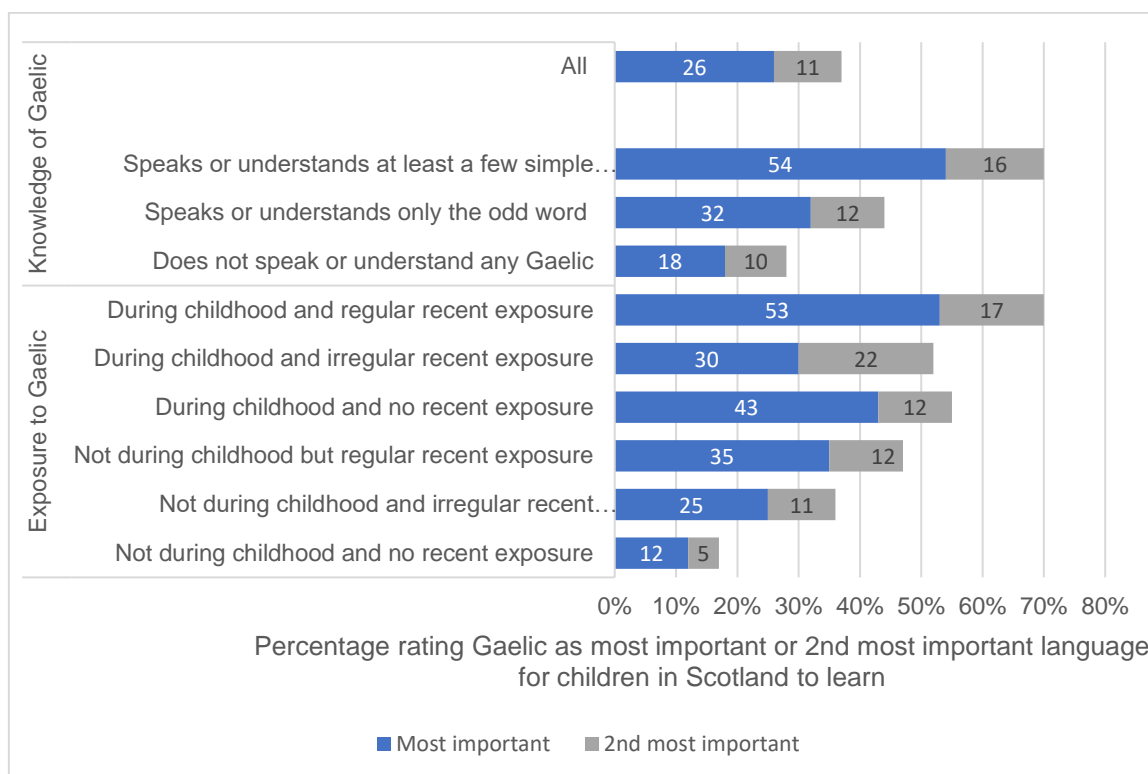


Base: All respondents

Greater differences are noted when looking at the proportion who say that Gaelic is the most important additional language for children to learn by level of knowledge of and exposure to Gaelic (see Figure 7.3). More than half (53%) of those who report an ability to either speak or understand at least a few sentences of Gaelic say that it is the most important language for children in Scotland to study. These proportions fall with decreasing linguistic competence, with 32% placing it first among those who can speak or understand only the odd word of Gaelic, and 18% placing it first among those who can neither speak nor understand any Gaelic.

Similarly, those who have been exposed to Gaelic during childhood and are currently exposed to it at least once a week through the media or online are more likely than others to prioritise the teaching of Gaelic. More than half (53%) of this group identify Gaelic as the most important language for children to study. Over a third (35%) of those who were not exposed to Gaelic in childhood but are regularly exposed to Gaelic in the media recently say it is the most important language, the same proportion who were exposed to it during childhood but have not been exposed to it in the media (35%). Over 1 in 10 (12%) of those who were not exposed during childhood nor via the media recently still say that Gaelic is the most important language for children to learn. See Figure 7.3 below for more detail.

Figure 7.3: Whether Gaelic is one of the two most important languages for children aged 5 to 15 in Scotland to study, by knowledge of Gaelic and exposure to Gaelic



Base: All respondents

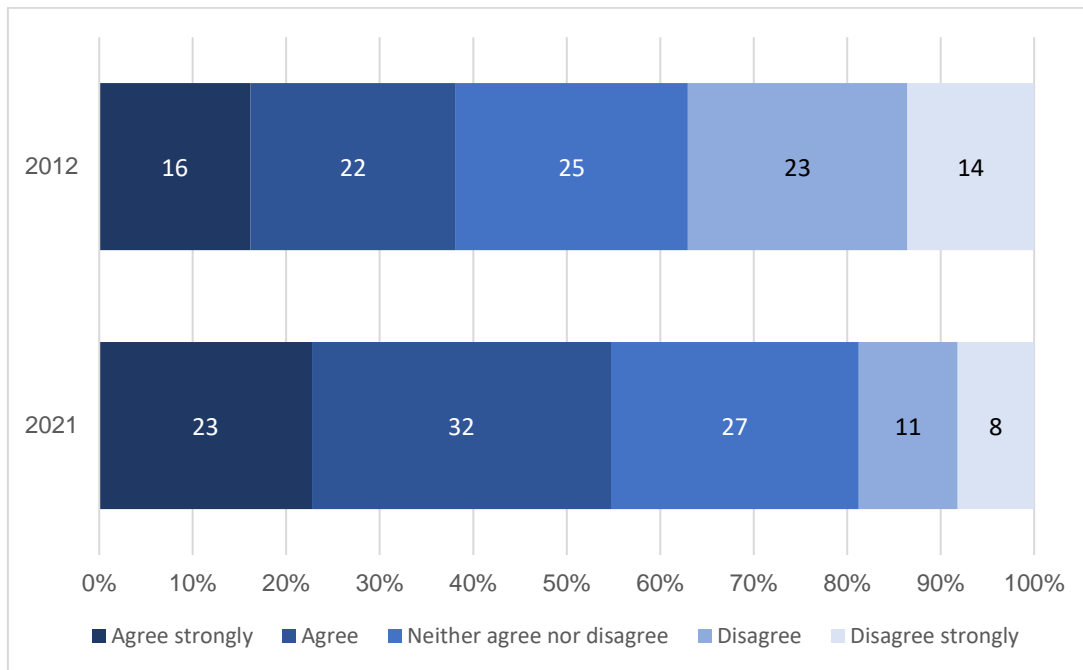
## 7.2 Attitudes towards teaching the Gaelic language to all children

Respondents were asked how much they agree or disagree that all children in Scotland aged 5 to 15 should be taught Gaelic as a school subject for an hour or two a week. A very similar question was asked in 2012, with two minor differences: a) the 2012 question referenced children aged 5 to 16; and b) “Can’t choose” was offered as an explicit option in 2012. These are not thought to affect the comparability of the responses.

Figure 7.4 shows that there has been a clear shift in responses between 2012 and 2021 in favour of Gaelic being taught to all school children. In 2012, 38% agreed with the statement, while 37% disagreed. In 2021, 55% agree and 19% disagree.



Figure 7.4: Level of agreement that all children should be taught Gaelic as a school subject for an hour or two a week<sup>a,b</sup>



<sup>a</sup> In 2012, the question asked about children aged 5 to 15. In 2021, it asked about children aged 5 to 16.

<sup>b</sup> In 2012 an explicit response of “Can’t choose” was offered. 2% chose this option. These have been excluded from the chart.

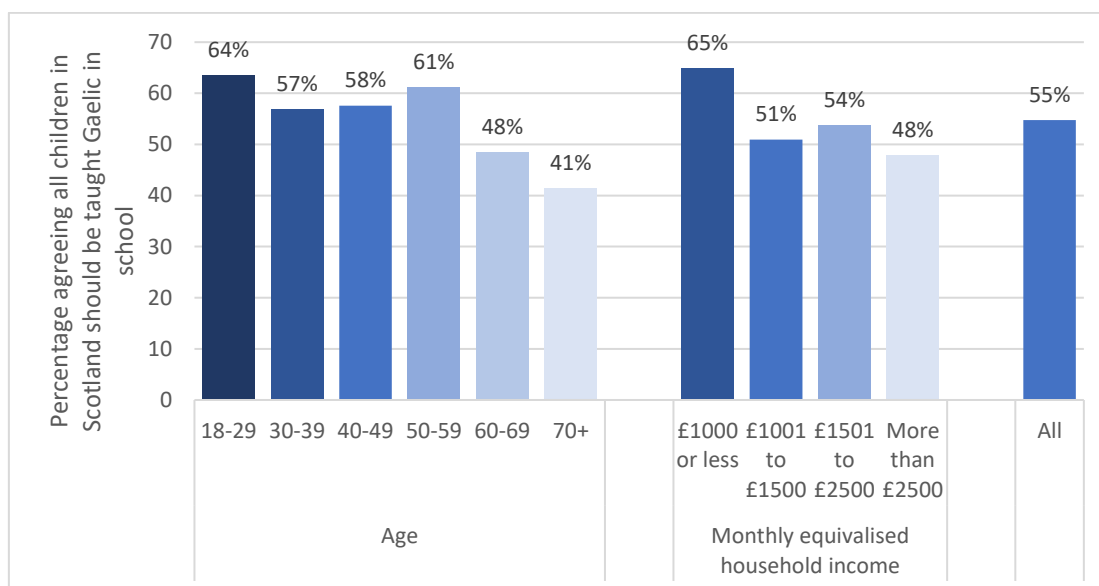
Base: All respondents

### How does this vary by sub-groups?

As shown in Figure 7.5, older people are less likely to agree that all children should be taught Gaelic in school. 2 in 5 (41%) of those aged 70 or above agree with the statement in 2021, compared with 3 in 5 of those aged between 18 and 59 (57-64% of the four younger age categories).

Those living in low income households are also more likely to agree that all children should be taught Gaelic in school (65% of those in the lowest income group, compared with 48-54% of those in the other three income groups).

Figure 7.5: Agreement that all children should be taught Gaelic as a school subject for an hour or two a week, by age and equivalised income



Base: All respondents

Those who speak or understand Gaelic are more likely than those who do not to be in favour of the teaching of Gaelic: 85% of those who speak or understand at least a few simple sentences of Gaelic agree with Gaelic being taught to all, as do 67% of those who speak or understand only the odd word. 43% of those who do not speak or understand any Gaelic agree with Gaelic being taught to all children between the ages of 5 and 15.

Similarly, those with greater exposure to Gaelic are more likely to agree with its teaching. The vast majority (90%) of those who heard Gaelic spoken during their childhood, and are still exposed at least once a week through the media or online, agree that children should be taught Gaelic in school, compared with 34% of those who were not exposed to Gaelic during childhood and not at all recently in the media. Exposure during childhood and current exposure through the media are equally associated with a favourable opinion of Gaelic being taught in school. Two-thirds (67%) of those who were not exposed to it during childhood but have been regularly through the media in the last year agree that Gaelic should be taught to all children, roughly the same proportion as those who were brought up with Gaelic but are not regularly exposed at the moment or not exposed at all (69%).

Not surprisingly, those who identify Gaelic as one of the two most important languages to learn are much more likely than others to agree it should be taught to all children (88% compared with 36%). Similarly, those who say Gaelic is important to their own cultural heritage are more likely to agree (92% of those who say it is very important and 83% of those who say it is fairly important, compared with 55% of those who say it is not very important and 24% of those who say it is not at all important).

Over 8 in 10 (82%) of those who think Gaelic is very important to the cultural heritage of Scotland agree Gaelic should be taught to all children in Scotland. A small proportion of those who do not believe Gaelic to be important to the cultural heritage of Scotland still say that Gaelic should be taught to all children: specifically, 14% of those who say it is not very important to Scotland and 4% of those who say it is not at all important.

Those who think that learning Gaelic improves someone's chances of getting a job are much more likely to say Gaelic should be taught to all children (85% of those who agree strongly that Gaelic improves the chances of getting a job and 84% of those who

---

agree, compared with 36% of those who disagree and 14% of those who disagree strongly).

## 7.3 Attitudes towards teaching Gaelic culture and history to all children

Following on from the question about the teaching of the Gaelic language, respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree that all children in Scotland aged 5 to 15 should be taught about Gaelic history and cultural heritage in school. The responses to this are more positive than towards the teaching of Gaelic language. More than two thirds (70%) agree, while only 7% disagree. This compares with the 55% who agree and 19% who disagree that Gaelic language should be taught to all children aged 5 to 15.

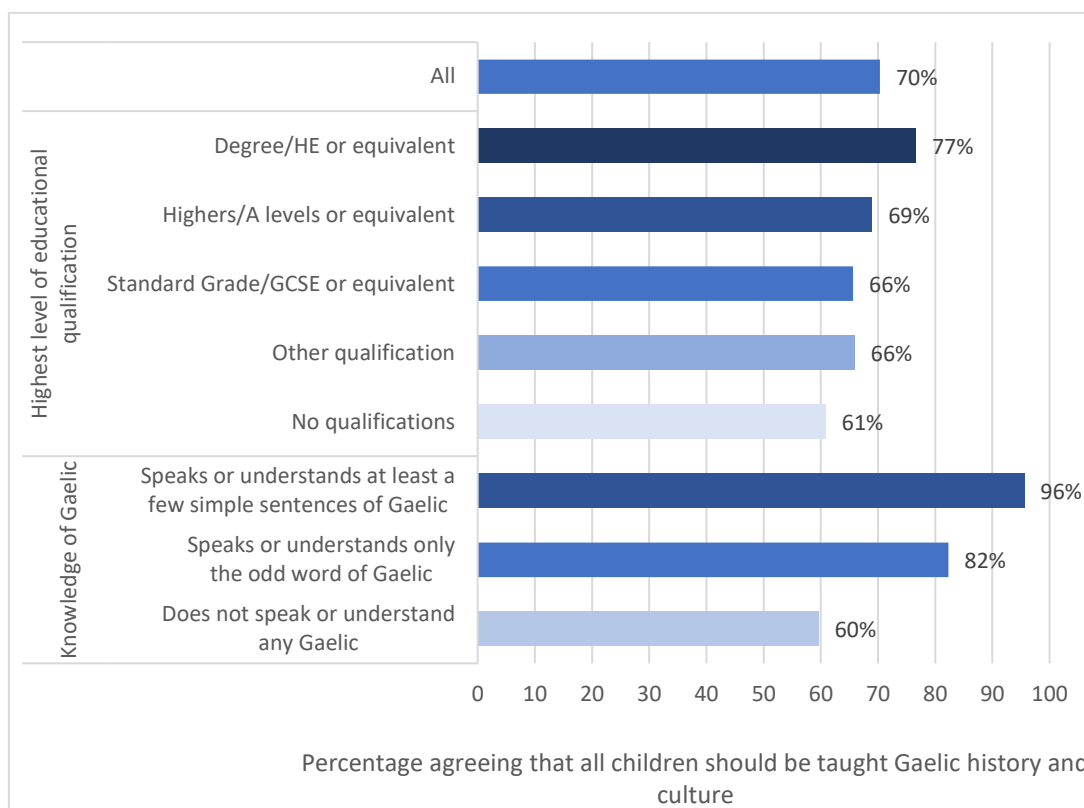
### How does this vary by sub-groups?

As with attitudes towards the teaching of the Gaelic language, older people tend to be less in favour of the teaching of Gaelic history and cultural heritage in schools. Around 6 in 10 people aged 60 or above (57% aged 60-69 and 61% aged 70 or above) agree that Gaelic history and culture should be taught to all children, compared with around 7 or 8 in 10 younger adults (70-81% of the other four age groups).

As shown in Figure 7.6, level of agreement with the teaching of Gaelic history and cultural heritage in schools tends to decrease with decreasing levels of educational qualification. Those with a university degree or equivalent are the most likely to agree (77%) and those with no qualifications the least likely (61%).

Patterns of agreement by knowledge of and exposure to Gaelic are similar to those seen for the other questions examined in this chapter. Nearly all (96%) of those who speak or understand at least a few simple sentences of Gaelic agree that Gaelic culture and history should be taught in schools, compared with 82% of those who only understand or speak the odd word and 60% of those who do not speak or understand any Gaelic. Of those who had exposure to Gaelic during childhood and regular recent exposure through the media or online, 94% are in favour of the teaching of Gaelic history and culture. This compares with 57% of those neither exposed to it during childhood nor at all in the media recently. Those exposed to Gaelic during childhood and with infrequent exposure through the media are a little more likely to be in favour of teaching of Gaelic history and culture at school (83%) than those not exposed to Gaelic during childhood but regularly exposed in the media recently (77%).

Figure 7.6: Level of agreement that all children should be taught Gaelic history and culture in school, by education and knowledge of Gaelic



Base: All respondents

Those living with children aged 18 or below are more likely than those not living with children to agree that all children should be taught Gaelic history and culture in school (78% of those with children, compared with 68% of those without).

## 7.4 Attitudes towards Gaelic-medium education

Respondents were asked whether they are in favour of, against or neither in favour of or against having some primary schools in Scotland where all the teaching is in Gaelic rather than English. Those who said they are in favour were also asked whether they think these schools should be everywhere in Scotland, or only in places where Gaelic is widely spoken.

More than a third (37%) are in favour of such Gaelic-medium schools, while a quarter (25%) say they are against them (13% somewhat against and 12% strongly against). Nearly 1 in 4 (38%) said they are neither in favour or against. Of those who are in favour, 75% say they should be everywhere in Scotland and 25% say they should be only in places where Gaelic is widely spoken.

### How does this vary by sub-groups?

There are very large differences in views on Gaelic-medium primary schools according to level of knowledge of Gaelic. Around 4 in 5 (79%) of those who speak or understand at least a few simple sentences in Gaelic are in favour of primary schools where all teaching is in Gaelic, compared with 2 in 5 (40%) of those who only speak or

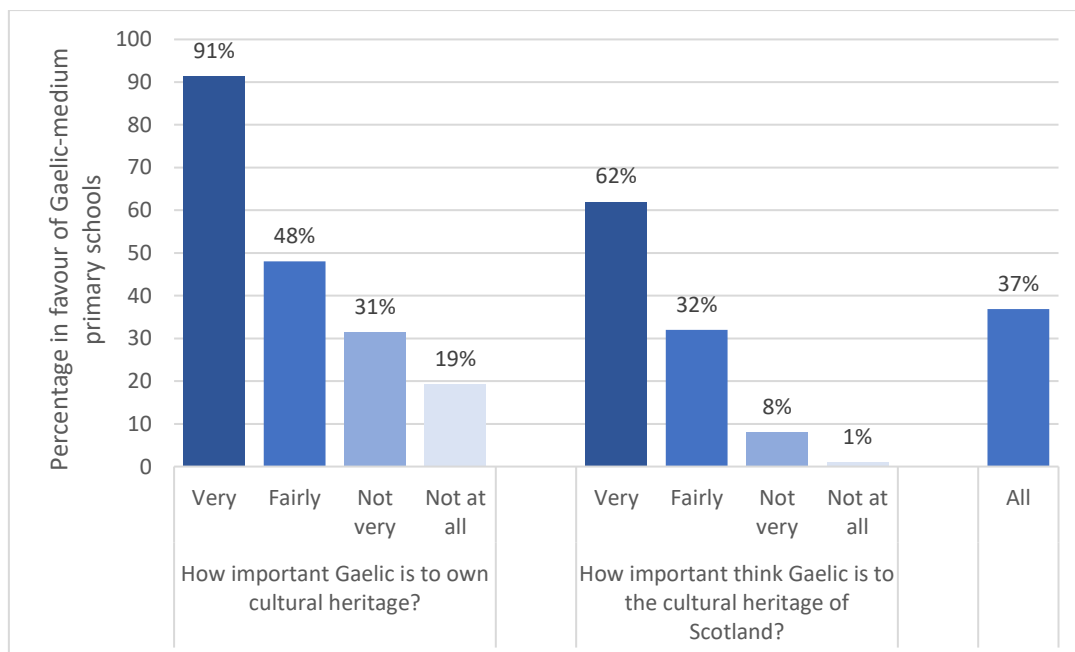
understand the odd word, and fewer (29%) among those who neither speak nor understand any Gaelic.

Similarly, two-thirds (66%) of those who were exposed to Gaelic during childhood and are regularly exposed to Gaelic through the media or online are in favour of Gaelic-medium schools, compared with over 2 in 10 (22%) of those with no exposure to Gaelic during childhood nor presently and 3 in 10 (30%) with no exposure during childhood and irregular (between once a month and once a week) recent exposure in the media or online. A similar proportion of those who were only exposed to Gaelic in childhood (but not at all recently in the media) and who were not exposed to Gaelic in childhood but are regularly in the media are in favour of Gaelic-medium schools (53% and 55%). This suggests that current media exposure is similarly important for favourable attitudes.

As with attitudes towards teaching Gaelic as a subject for an hour or two a week to all children, those holding the following more positive attitudes towards Gaelic are more likely than others to be in favour of Gaelic-medium schools:

- Those who state that Gaelic is one of the two most important languages for children in Scotland to study (62% in favour of Gaelic-medium schools, compared with 23% of those who do not list Gaelic as one of the two most important languages to learn).
- Those who identify Gaelic as being very important to their own cultural heritage; 91% compared with 19% who say it is not at all important (see Figure 7.7).
- Those who consider Gaelic to be very important to the cultural heritage of Scotland (62% compared with only 8% who think it not very important are in favour of Gaelic-medium schools). (See Figure 7.7).

Figure 7.7: Percentage in favour of having some primary schools in Scotland where all the teaching is in Gaelic, by importance of Gaelic to own cultural heritage and to the cultural heritage of Scotland



Base: All respondents

Views on whether Gaelic improves someone’s chances of getting a job are also associated with views of Gaelic-medium education, with those who agree much more likely to be in favour than those who disagree. 87% of those who agree strongly and

---

64% of those that agree that Gaelic improves one's chances of getting a job are in favour of Gaelic-medium education, compared with 21% of those who disagree and 10% who disagree strongly.

Those who are in favour of Gaelic-medium schools were asked whether these should be everywhere in Scotland, or just places where Gaelic is widely spoken. 75% said they should be everywhere in Scotland and 25% said they should be only in places where Gaelic is widely spoken.

Of the sub-groups examined in Annex Table 7.8, statistically significant differences are evident only with respect to knowledge of Gaelic. Those who speak or understand some Gaelic are more likely to say that Gaelic schools should be everywhere in Scotland (86% of those who can speak or understand at least a few simple sentences and 80% who can speak or understand the odd word, compared with 66% of those who do not speak any Gaelic at all).

---

## 8 Public spending on Gaelic

This chapter examines attitudes to Scottish Government spending on supporting Gaelic use and learning. Public money is spent on Gaelic in order to increase the number and range of contexts in which people can access the Gaelic language and culture, and to increase opportunities for people to use and / or learn the language. The Government supports the Gaelic language and culture in many areas of public life, such as the media, school education, publishing and cultural events (e.g. music and drama).

The 2021 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey explored the public's view on the level of Scottish Government spending in this area – whether it was too much, about right, or too little. Findings are presented below, along with sub-group analyses which explore whether views of public spending on Gaelic vary by the demographic variables of sex, age, highest level of education, household income (monthly equivalised), economic status, fluency in another language in addition to English, knowledge of Gaelic and exposure to Gaelic (during childhood and weekly in the media / online in the last 12 months). In addition this attitude is analysed by how important Gaelic is to their own cultural heritage and to that of Scotland as a whole.

The question on Scottish Government spending on Gaelic was also asked in the 2012 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, and results from that survey are provided for comparison of public views over time.

### 8.1 Views on Government spending on Gaelic

All respondents were given information on the current level of Scottish Government spending on the promotion of Gaelic (which is £29m for the year in 2021 equating to around £5.20 for each person in Scotland) and were asked their views on whether this was too much, too little or about the right amount.

The same question on attitudes to Scottish Government spending on Gaelic was also included in the 2012 survey where the amounts quoted were £24m per year, which was the equivalent to £4.80 per person in Scotland at the time.

Responses to this question in 2012 and 2021 are summarised in Table 8.1 below.

Table 8.1 – ‘The Scottish Government currently spends £24 / £29m every year on promoting the use of Gaelic, for example in TV, education and publishing. This comes to around £4.80 / £5.20 for each person in Scotland. Do you think this is...?’<sup>20</sup>

	2012	2021
Too much	35	30
About the right amount of money	48	48
Too little	17	22
<i>Weighted base</i>	1157	1348
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1148	1351

Base: All respondents

In 2021, just under half of adults in Scotland feel that the amount the Scottish Government are currently spending on Gaelic is about right (48%). 3 in 10 are of the opinion that this is too much (30%), while around 2 in 10 feel that it is too little (22%).

There has been a statistically significant change in the proportion of adults who feel that too little is being spent on Gaelic, which has increased from 17% in 2012 to 22% in 2021. In line with this there has been a decline (from 35% to 30%) in the proportion that feel that the level of spending on Gaelic is too much, whilst the proportion that are of the opinion that the spending is about right is unchanged at 48%.

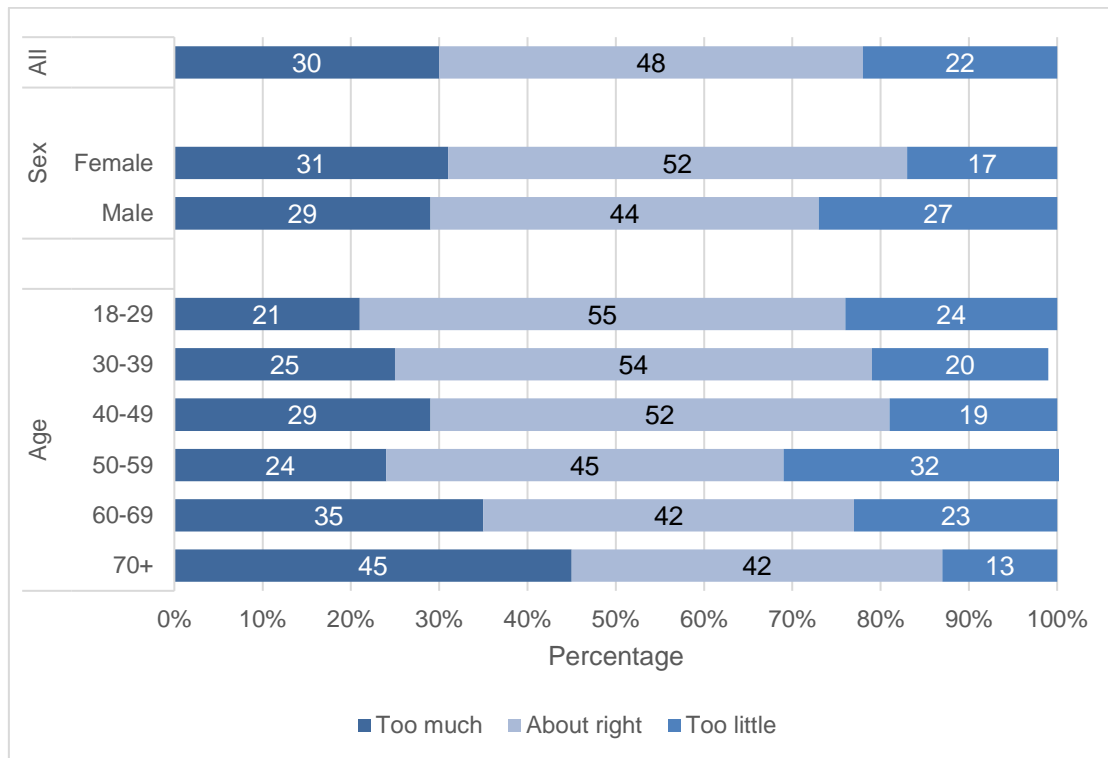
### How does this vary by sub-groups?

Attitudes towards the current level of Scottish Government spend on Gaelic varied by age and sex. The opinion that the current level of spending is too high is more prevalent among older adults, particularly those aged 70 and over, 45% of whom feel that this is too much compared with 21-29% of those aged 18-49.

<sup>20</sup> The order the options were presented to respondents in the survey was: ‘Too much, Too little or About the right amount of money?’



Figure 8.1 – Attitudes to level of Scottish Government spending on Gaelic in 2021 by sex and age

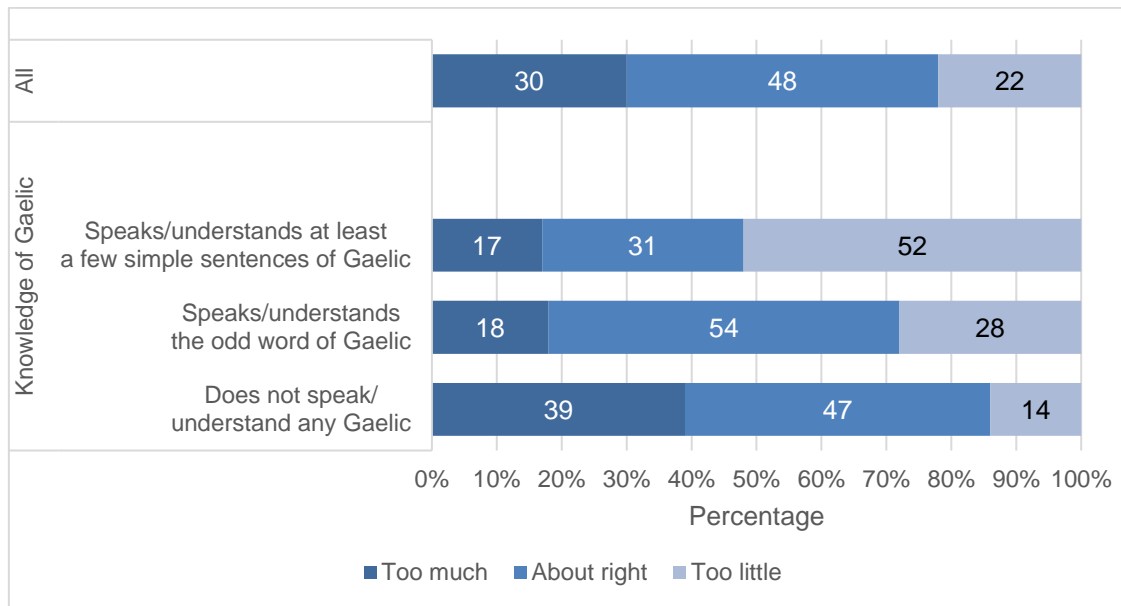


Base: All respondents

Men are more likely than women (27% compared with 17%) to view current spending on Gaelic as too little. Similar proportions of women and men think that the current level of spending is too much (31% and 29% respectively).

Differing opinions regarding the amount currently spent by the Scottish Government on Gaelic are also evident by knowledge of Gaelic. Just over half (52%) of those who speak / understand at least a few simple sentences of Gaelic are of the opinion that too little is currently being spent on the promotion of the language, compared with 28% of those who speak / understand a few words and 14% of those who do not speak / understand any Gaelic.

Figure 8.2 – Attitudes to level of Scottish Government spending on Gaelic in 2021 by knowledge of Gaelic



Base: All respondents

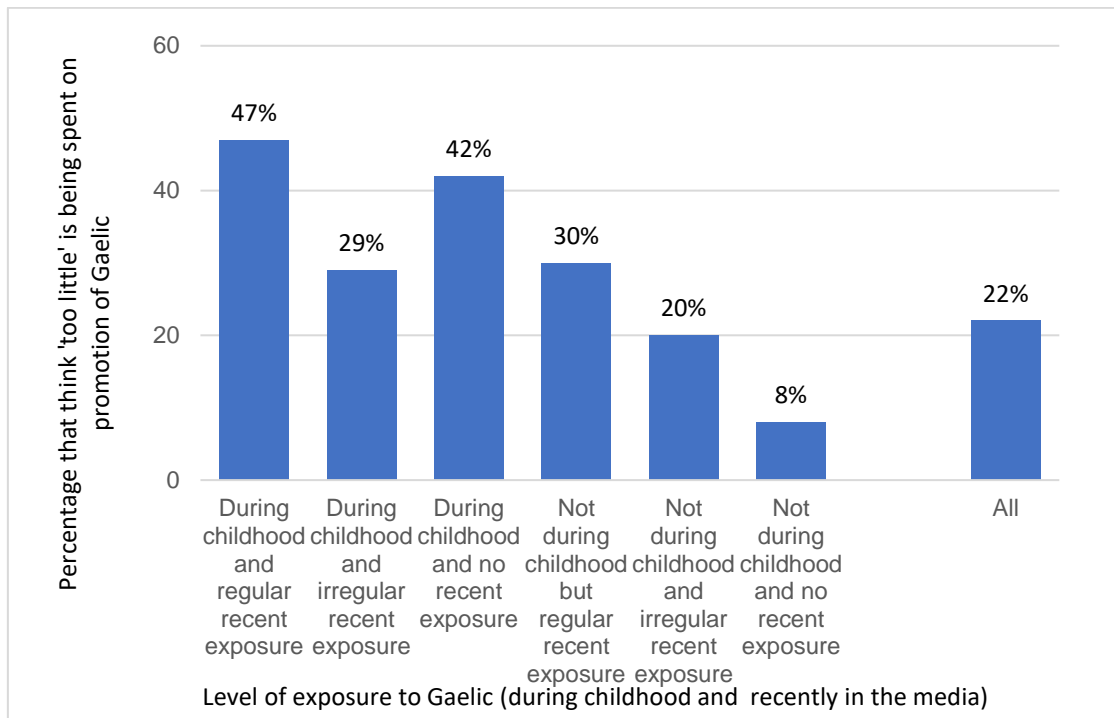
Conversely, 39% of those who do not speak / understand Gaelic state that there is too much being spent on promotion of the language compared with 18% of those who speak / understand the odd word and 17% who speak / understand at least a few sentences.

Those who have been exposed to Gaelic in childhood are twice as likely to feel that there is too little being spent on Gaelic (37%) as those who have not (18%).

There is also a linear relationship between frequency of exposure in the last 12 months via the media or online / through apps and the opinion that too little is being spent on Gaelic. Those who have been exposed to Gaelic more than once a week are nearly four times more likely to think that too little is being spent on Gaelic than those who have not been exposed to Gaelic in the media in the last 12 months (46% compared with 12%).

Figure 8.3 shows the relationship between the interaction of exposure during childhood and recent media exposure and the view that too little is currently being spent on Gaelic. Those exposed to Gaelic in childhood and regularly in the media or online recently are more likely to think that too little is being spent on Gaelic (47%) compared with 30% not exposed to Gaelic in childhood but regularly exposed recently in the media and only 8% not exposed to Gaelic in either of these ways.

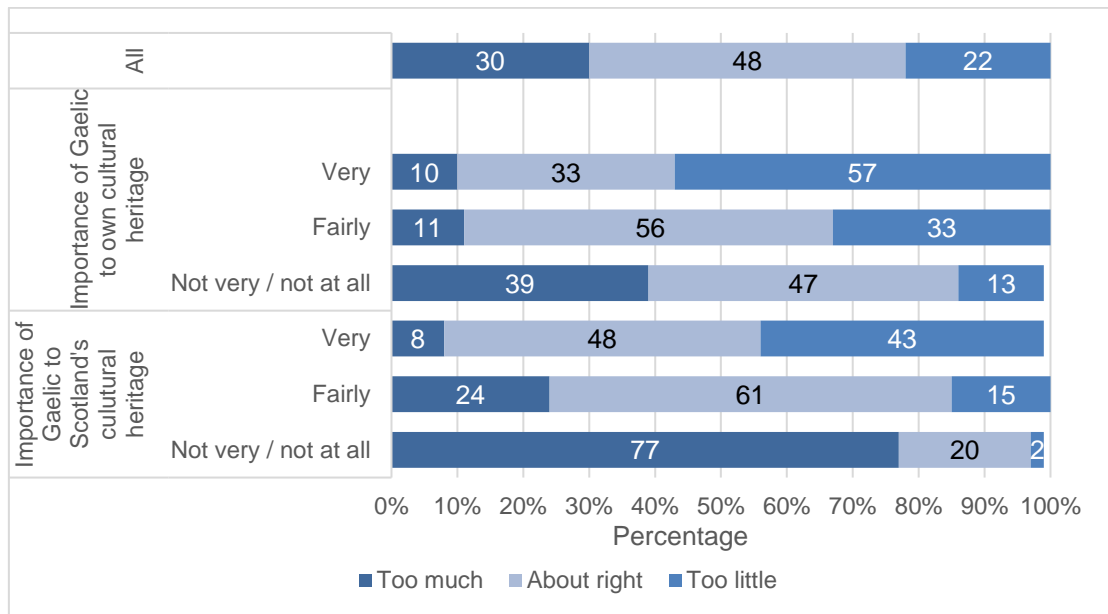
Figure 8.3 – Attitudes to level of Scottish Government spending on Gaelic in 2021 by level of Exposure during childhood and via the media / online in the last 12 months



Base: All respondents

Those for whom Gaelic is very important to their own cultural heritage are more likely than those for whom it is either not very or not at all important to say that too little is being spent on Gaelic (57% compared with 13%). In keeping with this, those who feel Gaelic is very or fairly important to their own cultural heritage are less likely to think that too much is being spent on promotion of the language (10-11%) than those who regard Gaelic as not very or not at all important to their heritage (39%).

Figure 8.4 – Attitudes to level of Scottish Government spending on Gaelic by importance of Gaelic to own cultural heritage and to that of Scotland



Base: All respondents

Variations in public opinion are even more pronounced when attitudes to Gaelic spending are analysed by opinions on the importance of the language to the cultural heritage of Scotland, as shown in Figure 8.4. Those who feel Gaelic is not very or not at all important to the cultural identity of Scotland are more likely to hold the opinion that too much is currently being spent on Gaelic (77%) compared with just 8% of those who feel that Gaelic is very important to the cultural heritage of Scotland<sup>21</sup>.

Conversely, those who feel that Gaelic is very important to the cultural heritage of Scotland are more likely to indicate that too little is currently being spent (43%) than those for whom Gaelic was seen as fairly important (15%), not very or not at all important to the cultural heritage of Scotland (4% and 0%).

<sup>21</sup> See Chapter 6 for figures on the importance of Gaelic to one's own cultural and to the cultural heritage of Scotland

---

## 9 The future of Gaelic

This chapter explores what people think about the future of the Gaelic language; specifically whether they think it will be spoken by more or fewer people in the future, and whether or not they would like it to be spoken more widely in years to come. The findings cover:

- Whether people *think* Gaelic will be spoken by more, fewer or the same number of people in 50 years' time
- Whether people *would like* Gaelic to be spoken by more, fewer or the same number of people in 50 years' time

Sub-group analysis is presented for both of these questions, which explore whether views vary by the demographic variables of sex, age, highest level of education, household income (monthly equivalised), economic status, fluency in another language in addition to English, knowledge of Gaelic and exposure to Gaelic (during childhood and weekly in the media / online in the last 12 months). In addition this attitude is analysed by how important Gaelic is to their own cultural heritage and to that of Scotland as well as views on Gaelic-medium education, level of comfort with hearing Gaelic spoken, views on the amount spent each year on Gaelic and views on bilingual signage.

The same questions were asked in the 2012 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey and comparisons are made with between the public's responses in 2012 and 2021.

### 9.1 Thoughts on whether Gaelic will be spoken more widely in 50 years' time

Respondents were asked whether they thought Gaelic would be spoken by more, fewer or about the same number of people in Scotland in 50 years' time, compared with now. More than half (55%) think that it will be spoken by fewer people in the future, while 18% think it will be spoken by more and 28% about the same.

Table 9.1: Thoughts on whether Gaelic will be spoken by more, fewer or the same number of people in 50 years' time

	2012	2021
	%	%
More people than now	14	18
About the same number of people as now	32	28
Fewer people than now	54	55
<i>Weighted base</i>	1198	1353
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1194	1357

Base: All respondents

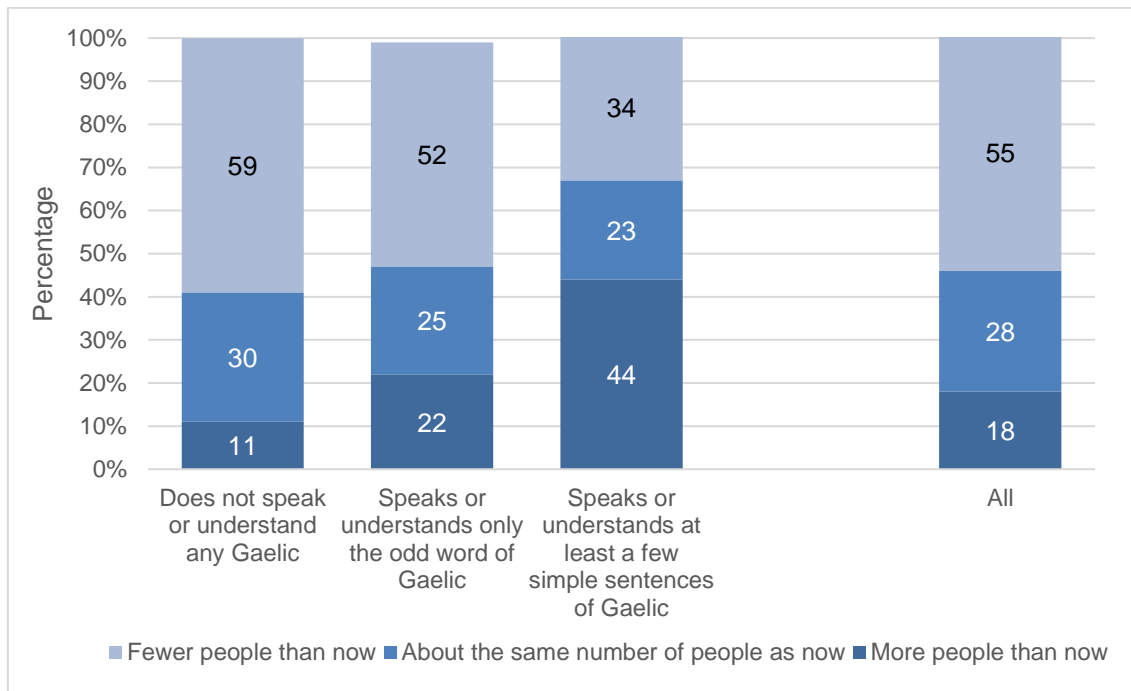
As Table 9.1 shows, these 2021 figures represent a slight increase in the proportion stating that they think more people than now will be speaking Gaelic in 50 years' time (14% in 2012 and 18% in 2021). There is no difference in the proportion thinking fewer people will be speaking Gaelic (54% in 2012 and 55% in 2021).

### How does this vary by sub-groups?

Younger people are more likely than older people to be pessimistic about the future of Gaelic, with 70% of those aged 18 to 29 and 64% of those aged 30 to 49 saying that they think fewer people will be speaking Gaelic in 50 years time, compared with 44% of those aged 50 and above.

Figure 9.1 below shows that those who can speak or understand at least a few sentences of Gaelic are more likely than others to believe it will become more commonly spoken (and less likely to believe it will become rarer). Around 4 in 10 (44%) of those who can speak or understand at least a few sentences say it will be spoken by more people in 50 years time, compared with 1 in 10 (11%) who speak or understand no Gaelic and around 2 in 10 (22%) who can manage only the odd word. At the same time, a third (34%) of those who can speak or understand at least a few simple sentences of Gaelic are pessimistic about its future, although this proportion is larger for those who do not speak or understand any Gaelic (59%) and those who can speak or understand only the odd word (52%).

Figure 9.1 Percentage who think there will be more people than now speaking Gaelic in 50 years' time, about the same number, or fewer, by knowledge of Gaelic



Base: All respondents

A similar sort of pattern can be seen according to the level of exposure people have to Gaelic. As shown in Table 9.2, those exposed to Gaelic during childhood and at least once a week in the last 12 months are three times more likely than those not exposed in childhood nor recently via the media to think Gaelic will be spoken by more people in the future (36% compared with 11%). Recent media / online exposure seems to play an important part in this association as nearly 1 in 3 (29%) who were not exposed to Gaelic during childhood but have been recently each week in the media / online thought there will be more Gaelic speakers in the future, which is only a little lower than the proportion exposed to Gaelic both in childhood and regularly in the media recently (36%).

Table 9.2: Thoughts on whether Gaelic will be spoken by more, fewer or the same number of people in 50 years' time by Exposure to Gaelic

	During childhood, and regular recent exposure	During childhood, and irregular recent exposure	During childhood, and no recent exposure	Not during childhood, but regular recent exposure	Not during childhood, and irregular recent exposure	Not during childhood, and no recent exposure
	%	%	%	%	%	%
More people than now	36	11	37	29	15	11
About the same number of people as now	29	30	13	35	29	23
Fewer people than now	35	59	51	37	56	66
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>84</i>	<i>130</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>190</i>	<i>552</i>	<i>350</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>88</i>	<i>114</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>230</i>	<i>581</i>	<i>306</i>

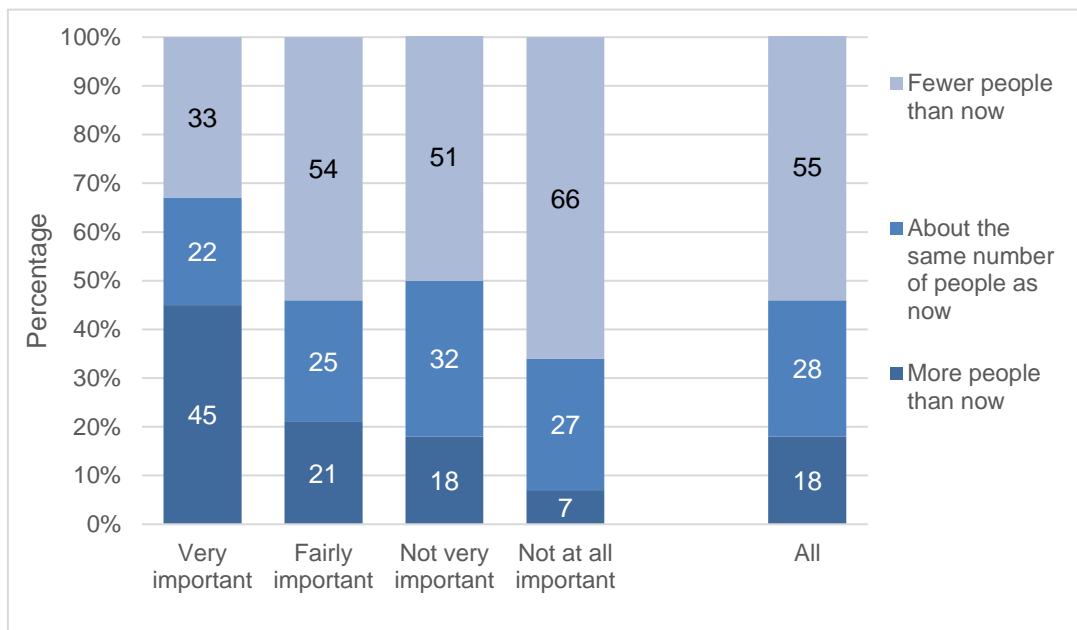
Base: All respondents

Generally speaking, those who are more positive towards Gaelic are more likely than those with more negative attitudes to think the number of people speaking Gaelic will increase over the next 50 years. However, in all cases a substantial proportion of those with positive attitudes towards Gaelic are pessimistic about its future, for example:

- Those who say Gaelic is very important to their own cultural heritage (45% saying Gaelic speaking will increase and 33% saying it will decrease). Of those who say Gaelic speaking is not important to their own cultural heritage, 7% think it will become more prevalent and 66% less prevalent (see Figure 9.2).

Figure 9.2 Percentage who think there will be more people than now speaking Gaelic in 50 years' time, about the same number, or fewer, by how important Gaelic is to own cultural heritage





Base: All respondents

- Of those who think Gaelic very important to the cultural heritage of Scotland, 27% think it will become more widely spoken and 49% less widely spoken, while of those who think it not at all important to Scotland’s cultural heritage, 5% think the number of speakers will increase, and 75% think it will decrease.
- Of those strongly in favour of Gaelic-medium schools 40% think Gaelic speaking will increase and 34% think it will decrease, whereas 5% of those strongly against such schools think it will increase and 73% think it will decrease.
- Of those who strongly agree Gaelic should be taught to all school children 32% think Gaelic speaking will increase (and 43% decrease) whereas only 5% of those who strongly disagree think it will increase (and 78% decrease).
- Of those who believe road signs should be in Gaelic and English across all of Scotland 27% think more people will be speaking Gaelic in the future, while 49% think fewer people will. In contrast, just 5% of those who think road signs should only be in English believe Gaelic speaking will increase and 76% believe it will decrease.
- Of those who think too little money is being spent on Gaelic, 37% think Gaelic speaking will become more common in 50 years’ time, compared with 7% of those who think too much money is spent.

## 9.2 Thoughts on whether people would like Gaelic to be spoken more widely in 50 years’ time

The question regarding whether the respondent thinks Gaelic will become more commonly spoken in 50 years’ time was followed by one which asked how many people in Scotland the respondent would like to be speaking Gaelic in 50 years time – more, fewer, or about the same number as today.

More than half (56%) say that they would like the number of Gaelic speakers to increase in the next 50 years. This represents a rise of 10 percentage points since 2012, when 46% wanted more people to speak Gaelic in the future (see Table 9.3). A much smaller proportion say they would like fewer people to be speaking Gaelic in 50

years time (13%). This figure is more similar in 2021 and 2012 (13% in 2021 and 11% in 2012).

Table 9.3: Thoughts on whether would like Gaelic will to be spoken by more, fewer or the same number of people in 50 years' time

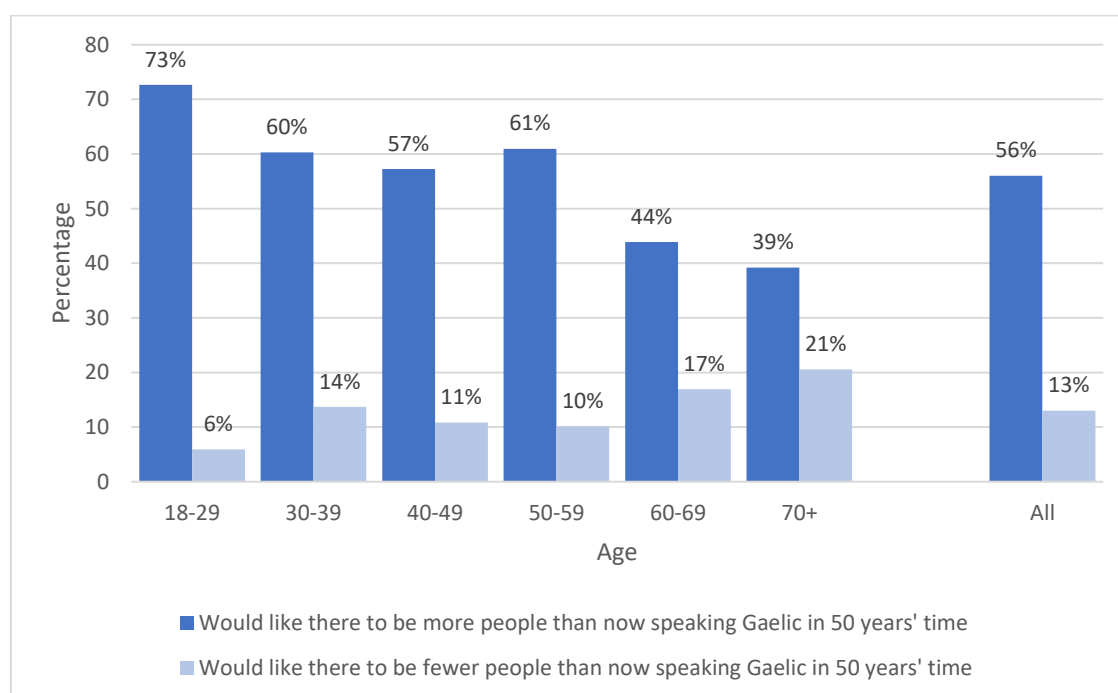
	2012	2021
	%	%
More people than now	46	56
About the same number of people as now	42	31
Fewer people than now	11	13
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>1121</i>	<i>1353</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1114</i>	<i>1356</i>

Base: All respondents

### How does this vary by sub-groups?

The proportion saying they would like to see more Gaelic speakers in the future is highest in the youngest age group (73% of those aged 18 to 29) and lowest in the oldest age groups (39% of those aged 70 and above). The reverse is true for the proportion who would like to see fewer Gaelic speakers, which is 6% among those aged 18 to 29 and 21% among those aged 70 and above (see Figure 9.3).

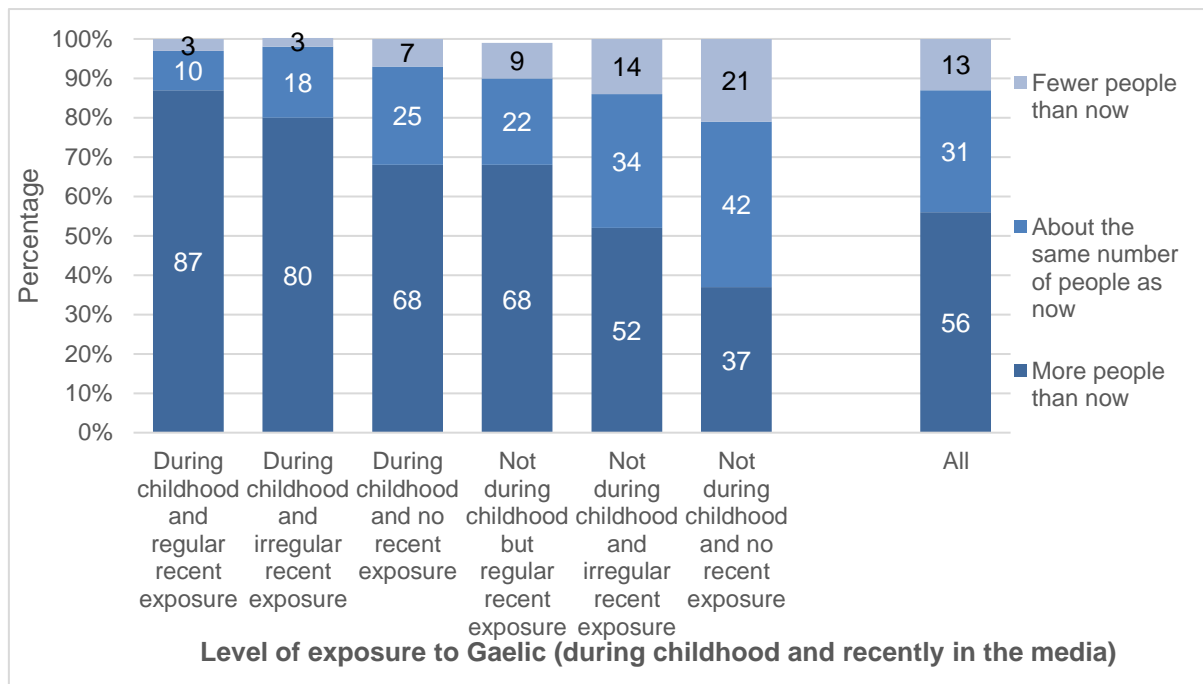
Figure 9.3 Percentage who would like there to be more / fewer people than now speaking Gaelic in 50 years' time, by age



Base: All respondents

Whether the public would like more people to speak Gaelic in the future also varied by their level of knowledge of and exposure to Gaelic. The large majority (89%) of those who can speak or understand at least a few sentences of Gaelic say they would like to see the number of Gaelic speakers go up over the next 50 years. This compares with 69% of those who speak or understand only the odd word and 42% of those who do not speak or understand any Gaelic. Similarly, those with the greatest exposure to Gaelic are most likely to want the number of speakers to go up (87% of those who were exposed during childhood and recently through the media / online compared with 37% of those who were not exposed during childhood nor at all in the media / online recently – see Figure 9.4).

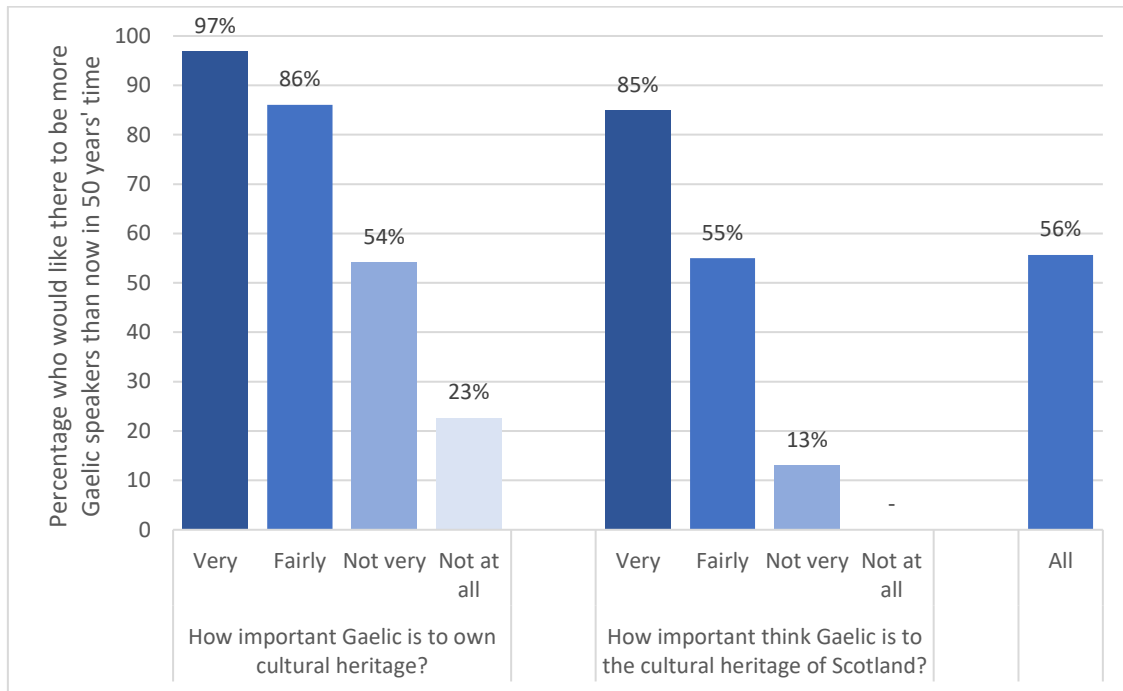
Figure 9.4 Percentage who would like there to be more people than now speaking Gaelic in 50 years' time, about the same number, or fewer, by level of exposure to Gaelic



Base: All respondents

Those who view Gaelic to be important to their own cultural heritage and to the cultural heritage of Scotland tend to want the number of Gaelic speakers to increase. In contrast, those who express the opposite attitudes are much more likely to wish to see the number of speakers decrease. Figure 9.6 shows the linear relationship between perceptions of importance of Gaelic to one's own cultural heritage and that of Scotland. Nearly all (97%) of those who consider Gaelic very important to their own cultural heritage would like to see more people speaking Gaelic in the future, compared with 23% of those who do not consider it important at all to their cultural heritage.

Figure 9.5 Percentage who would like there to be more people than now speaking Gaelic in 50 years' time, by level of importance of Gaelic to one's own cultural heritage and to the cultural heritage of Scotland



Base: All respondents

In addition, those holding more positive attitudes in relation to Gaelic teaching, road signs in Gaelic, and the spending of public money on Gaelic are more likely to want to see the number of Gaelic speakers increase. Specifically,

- Those strongly in favour of Gaelic-medium schools (92%) compared with those strongly against (12%)
- Those who strongly agree all school children should be taught Gaelic (95%) compared with those who strongly disagree (5%)
- Those who think road signs across Scotland should be in both Gaelic and English (83%) compared with those who think they should be in English only (5%)
- Those who think the level of spending by the Scottish Government on Gaelic is too low (92%) compared with those who think it is too high (18%).

---

# Conclusions and recommendations

## Continuity and change in public attitudes to Gaelic

The Scottish Social Attitudes Surveys of 2012 and 2021 aimed to explore (i) levels of public knowledge of, and exposure to, the Gaelic language, and (ii) public attitudes towards initiatives to increase the visibility and use of Gaelic in a range of social contexts. In so doing, the surveys have collected data that can help both to assess the impact of previous language planning and language policies for the Gaelic language in Scotland, and which can inform future policy and planning.

The 2021 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey replicated fourteen key questions from the 2012 survey to enable comparison over time, and included seven new questions to collect data relating to current policy developments, such as the introduction of the 1+2 Languages Policy in education, where all pupils learn two languages in addition to their main language of learning (English or Gaelic) at school, and to current language planning priorities as expressed in Bòrd na Gàidhlig's Corporate plan 2018-23<sup>d</sup> (such as interest amongst adults in Scotland in learning Gaelic, and their views on whether learning Gaelic would have instrumental or intrinsic benefits in relation to getting a job or giving someone a sense of achievement).

In summary of the 'over time' data, in the last decade there has been a shift towards more positive attitudes regarding the Gaelic language among adults in Scotland in relation to views on Gaelic being taught as a subject to all pupils for an hour or two per week in school, support for public spending on Gaelic, and increased desire that the Gaelic language is spoken by more people in the future. There has also been an increase in the public's exposure to Gaelic public signage (road, street or other public signs), an increase in reported knowledge of the Gaelic language, and an increase in the proportion of people reporting Gaelic to be important to their own cultural heritage between 2012 and 2021. In addition to these positive shifts, a number of other attitudes towards Gaelic have remained stable over the last decade – namely, public views on Gaelic-English road, street or other public signs, level of comfort with hearing the language spoken, and views of the importance of Gaelic to the cultural heritage of the Highlands and Islands and to Scotland. Levels of reported exposure to Gaelic during childhood and recently in the media and / or online have not significantly changed over time. There were no statistically significant negative shifts in exposure or attitude amongst the fourteen questions on Gaelic asked in both 2012 and 2021.

As noted above, the new questions for 2021 had a focus on school education and adult learning of Gaelic, as the acquisition of Gaelic is a key aspect of current Gaelic language policy and planning<sup>e</sup> (Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2018, pp.30-32). The views expressed on school education reflected strong support for the learning of Gaelic as a language and for learning about Gaelic culture and heritage in English-medium schools in Scotland. Over a third of people (37%) believe Gaelic to be one of the two most important languages for children in Scotland to learn at school, and more than two thirds of people (70%) agree that all children should be taught about Gaelic history and cultural heritage in school between the ages of 5 and 15. There was greater diversity of opinion in relation to public support for the existence of Gaelic-medium primary schools. Whilst more than a third of people (37%) are in favour of having some primary schools in Scotland where all teaching and learning is in Gaelic, and a similar proportion are indifferent (38% reporting themselves to be neither in favour or against) – a total of 75%, 25% of report themselves to be against the existence of Gaelic-medium primary education in Scotland. In relation to adult learning of Gaelic, those who are not fluent in Gaelic (99.5% of the sample) were asked if they would like to be able to speak Gaelic better than they do now. 65% said that they would like to be able to (17% a great deal, 22% somewhat and 26% a little). This question was asked at the start of questions on Gaelic, before any attitudinal questions. Later in the survey,

---

respondents were asked for the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that learning Gaelic would give someone a sense of achievement, would improve their chances of getting a job, and would make someone more Scottish. Although 70% felt that learning Gaelic would give someone a sense of achievement (23% neither agree or disagree, 7% disagree), only 14% believed it would increase one's chances of getting a job (45% neither agree or disagree, 42% disagree), and only 23% agree that learning Gaelic makes someone more Scottish (33% neither agree or disagree, 44% disagree).

The chapters of this report have discussed the findings in relation to eight topics, namely knowledge of Gaelic, exposure to Gaelic, attitudes to Gaelic signage and to Gaelic speaking, views on learning Gaelic, Gaelic and cultural heritage, Gaelic in education, public spending on Gaelic, and Gaelic in the future (Chapters 2-9). Within each of these chapters, sub-group analysis, which explores the socio-demographic factors associated with patterns of response to individual questions, or across questions within a topic, has also been presented.

In this section, we will summarize factors that emerged as being linked to more supportive attitudes towards the Gaelic language across topics. The three key factors were younger age, knowledge of Gaelic, and greater exposure to Gaelic (during childhood and / or over the last 12 months in the media, online or via apps, or on road, street or other public signage), but a higher level of education was also associated with several more favourable attitudes towards the Gaelic language. These associations are summarized below and are detailed in Appendix A - Table 1. Our final section reflects on the groupings of supportive attitudes towards Gaelic, focusing on those who feel Gaelic to be an important language to learn and those who believe Gaelic to be important to their own cultural heritage or that of Scotland. These are summarized below.

### **Key demographic factors associated with positive attitudes**

Three key factors were associated with positive attitudes towards Gaelic: age, knowledge of Gaelic and exposure to Gaelic. Higher level of education was also associated with more favourable attitudes towards the Gaelic language, but was associated with far fewer attitudinal variables than age, knowledge of Gaelic and exposure to Gaelic.

Younger adults (those aged 18-29) in Scotland are more likely to be supportive of bilingual signs, to believe learning Gaelic gives someone a sense of achievement and improves someone's chances of getting a job, to want more people to speak Gaelic in the future, and to be keen to learn more Gaelic themselves. In contrast, those in the oldest age group (70+) are less likely to hold these views. Those over 70 are also more likely to feel that too much public money is being spent on Gaelic and are less in favour of the teaching of Gaelic as a language, and of teaching about Gaelic history and cultural heritage in schools.

Those with greater knowledge of Gaelic tend to hold more favourable views of the language in a range of areas (see Appendix A - Table 1). For example they are more likely to agree that learning Gaelic gives someone a sense of achievement and that it improves someone's chances of getting a job, and they are more likely to be in favour of primary schools where the main teaching is in Gaelic.

Exposure to the Gaelic language – in childhood or more recently through media or online exposure (over the previous 12 months), are both linked to positive views of the language, often with childhood exposure being more strongly associated with such views. For example, the belief that Gaelic is important to one's own cultural heritage and to that of the Highlands and Islands, and the desire to speak better Gaelic. In some cases, recent exposure to Gaelic is equally associated with positive views of the language such as with the view that all children should be taught Gaelic in school and that too little public money is currently being spent on Gaelic. The survey also explored the frequency of people's exposure to road, street and other public signs in Gaelic, and

---

provides evidence that regular (at least weekly) exposure to Gaelic signs is associated with a greater level of support for bilingual signage across Scotland and a desire to speak better Gaelic.

Higher levels of education are associated with more positive views on Gaelic such as a greater level of comfort with hearing Gaelic spoken, the belief that Gaelic history and cultural heritage should be taught in schools and that learning Gaelic gives someone a sense of achievement. Those with higher levels of education also tend to have a greater reported knowledge of, and exposure to, Gaelic signs, however, so there may be some influence from knowledge and exposure to Gaelic within the attitudes of this highly educated socio-demographic group.

### **Associations between attitudinal or identity variables**

In addition, there are associations between attitudinal and identity variables and other attitudes. Those who believe that Gaelic is one of the two most important languages for children in Scotland to study tend to support the teaching of Gaelic (as a subject to all children in English-medium education, and as a language of teaching and learning in Gaelic-medium education). Those who perceive Gaelic to be important to cultural heritage (their own or that of Scotland) also tend to have positive views on Gaelic in education, and a wish that the number of Gaelic speakers will increase over time. In addition, those who view Gaelic to be important to cultural heritage group also tend to hold the view that too little is currently being spent on the Gaelic language in Scotland. Future research could examine in more detail the relationship between attitudinal and identity towards Gaelic and other attitudes.

### **Implications for policy and for further research**

The suite of questions on public attitudes to Gaelic in the Scottish Social Attitudes Surveys of 2012 and 2021 provide an evidence base on which to assess existing policy initiatives relating to increasing public awareness of, and access to, the Gaelic language and culture in Scotland. They also provide research evidence which may help to inform future policy direction for Bòrd na Gàidhlig and other organisations in Scotland who work to support the visibility and use of the Gaelic language. In terms of future research, further statistical analysis to explore associations between attitudinal variables is planned, but qualitative research would also be valuable to explore key findings of interest in the current survey in more detail. We would recommend that the present survey of public attitudes to Gaelic be complemented by a survey of the language skills, experiences and attitudes of Gaelic speakers, and that both surveys be repeated on a 10-year basis, to continue to inform public policy for the ongoing vitality of the Gaelic language and culture in Scotland.



# Appendix A. Table 1

**Table 1: Significant associations between attitudes, knowledge and exposure and socio-demographic / background factors**

	Sex	Age	Education	Household income	Whether multilingual	Knowledge of Gaelic	Exposure to Gaelic	Exposure to Gaelic signs	Child status
Ability to speak Gaelic			✓		✓		✓		
Understanding of Gaelic					✓		✓		
Overall knowledge of Gaelic			✓						
Desire to be able to speak Gaelic better than currently		✓				✓	✓	✓	
Exposure to Gaelic in childhood		✓			✓	✓			
Exposure to Gaelic in the media	✓	✓			✓	✓			
Combined exposure to Gaelic						✓			
Exposure to Gaelic signs	✓		✓			✓	✓		
Attitudes towards hearing people speak Gaelic			✓			✓	✓		
Attitudes towards Gaelic signage		✓				✓	✓	✓	
Whether learning Gaelic gives someone a sense of achievement		✓	✓			✓	✓		
Whether learning Gaelic improves someone's chances of getting a job		✓				✓	✓		
Attitudes towards whether learning Gaelic makes someone more Scottish					✓	✓	✓		
Importance of Gaelic to one's own cultural heritage						✓	✓		
Importance of Gaelic to the cultural heritage of the Highlands and Islands		✓				✓	✓		
Importance of Gaelic to Scotland's cultural heritage	✓	✓				✓	✓		
Languages thought important to study				✓		✓	✓		
Attitudes towards teaching Gaelic language to all children		✓		✓		✓	✓		
Attitudes towards teaching Gaelic culture and history to all children		✓	✓			✓	✓		✓
Attitudes towards Gaelic-medium education						✓	✓		
Those in favour of Gaelic-medium schools						✓			
Views on Government spending on Gaelic	✓	✓				✓	✓		
Thoughts on whether Gaelic will be spoken more widely in 50 years' time		✓				✓	✓		
Thoughts on whether would like Gaelic to be spoken more widely in 50 years' time		✓				✓	✓		



---

# References

---

<sup>a</sup> ScotCen Social Research. (2013). *Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, 2012*. [data collection]. *2nd Edition*. UK Data Service. SN: 7338, DOI: [10.5255/UKDA-SN-7338-2](https://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7338-2)

<sup>b</sup> Scottish Parliament (2005) *Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005*. Edinburgh: Scottish Parliament.

<sup>c</sup> Scottish Government (2012) *Language Learning in Scotland: a 1+2 approach*. The Scottish Government's response to the report of the languages working group. Edinburgh: The Scottish Government.

<sup>d</sup> Bòrd na Gàidhlig (2018) *Corporate Plan 2018-23*. Inverness: Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

<sup>e</sup> Bòrd na Gàidhlig (2018) *National Gaelic Language Plan 2018-23*. Inverness: Bòrd na Gàidhlig.