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*A' Chiad Ghinealach:*  
The Experience of Gaelic Medium Education in the Western Isles

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## Abstract

This thesis aims to provide a study of the experience of the first generation of pupils in the Western Isles who have been through the primary Gaelic-medium education system, and were in six-year secondary schools in the region at the time of this research. The study consists of illustrative analysis and commentary of pupil and parental responses to questionnaire surveys. In addition, pupils, teachers and educationalists were interviewed and their perceptions of the aims and effectiveness of Gaelic-medium education and the issues surrounding it are presented. A further aim of this research was to consider the current status of Gaelic education within the context of the debate on the history of language decline, identity and the ideology of future language planning. I do not seek to give an evaluation of Gaelic medium education in terms of its pedagogic success. My aim is rather to consider the overall experience in the contexts in which the participants and stake holders find themselves and in the wider backdrop of issues and theories surrounding identity, culture and language revitalisation.

Chapter 1 outlines the aims of the research, examines historical factors and other key issues of Gaelic language decline and tracks the development of Gaelic medium education through the primary schools bilingual education project to the implementation and further progress of GME (Gaelic-medium education) and the pivotal role of parents in the Western Isles.

Chapter 2 In this chapter I have provided an overview of key areas of interest included in my research ranging from the perceived status of Gaelic to the theoretical questions on language preservation culture and identity which are relevant to the position of Gaelic today.

Chapter 3. This chapter outlines the methodology of the research and the scope of the study.

Chapter 4 consists of an analysis of the pupil questionnaire survey responses presented in the form of graphs and commentary. The chapter concludes with a short summary of responses to the questionnaire themes.

In Chapter 5, I present analysis and commentary on the group interviews conducted in four six-year secondary schools in Lewis, Harris, Uist and Barra respectively, together with a discussion of the broader themes that emerged from the interviews.

Chapter 6 reviews and analyses the parent responses to a questionnaire survey designed to ascertain their perceptions of the effectiveness of the GM (Gaelic-medium) education.

Chapter 7 considers the views of Head Teachers, Gaelic teachers and other educationalists on GM education and key issues such as language planning and the status of Gaelic.

Chapter 8 considers some issues of the stewardship and regeneration of Gaelic and draws comparisons between the ideologies which underpin language regeneration policies elsewhere in Europe and in North America. Key issues discussed are the place of Gaelic within national and local planning strategies and the support offered both to the language and to the parents who opt for Gaelic-medium education.

Chapter 9 offers a brief review of the information gleaned from the views of the client groups of Gaelic-medium education. The chapter then gives my conclusions which refer to the overall effectiveness of Gaelic-medium education both in terms of language acquisition and cultural enhancement. The chapter makes recommendations for the future development of an effective Gaelic-medium education strategy which embraces the broader issues of culture and identity facing schools and language policy makers within and beyond the Western Isles.

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## Table of Contents

<i>Abstract.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Acknowledgements.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Chapter 1 – Introduction to the Research.....</i>	<i>9</i>
Aims .....	9
Key Factors In Gaelic Decline .....	11
Bilingual Education Project in the Western Isles: Phase 1 .....	18
Bilingual Education Project in the Western Isles: Phase 2 .....	21
The Inception of GME.....	25
Monitoring the Progress of GME.....	30
The Role of Parents .....	35
Chapter 1 Summary .....	37
<i>Chapter 2 – Research Foci.....</i>	<i>38</i>
Status of Gaelic .....	38
Language, Culture and Identity .....	42
Chapter 2 Summary .....	56
<i>Chapter 3 – Methodology of Research.....</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>Chapter 4 – Pupil Questionnaire Details.....</i>	<i>65</i>
Question 1 .....	65
Question 2 .....	66
Question 3 .....	67
Question 4 .....	69
Question 5 .....	74
Question 6 .....	75
Question 7 .....	76
Question 8 .....	78
Question 9 .....	80
Question 10 .....	83
Question 11 .....	85
Question 13 .....	93
Question 14 .....	95
Question 15 .....	97
Question 16 .....	99
Question 17 .....	100

Question 18.....	102
Question 19.....	105
Question 20.....	108
Question 21.....	110
Question 22.....	112
Question 23.....	116
Question 24.....	117
Question 25.....	119
Question 26.....	121
Question 27.....	123
Summary of Questionnaire Information .....	124
Home Experience of Gaelic Q1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.....	124
Primary School Experience Q3, 4, 5 .....	124
Secondary School Experience of Gaelic Q11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17.....	125
Benefits of Studying Gaelic Q 18, 19, 20 .....	125
Gaelic in the Wider Community Q21, 22, 23, 24,25, 26, 27.....	125
<i>Chapter 5 – Pupil Interviews.....</i>	<i>127</i>
Introduction.....	127
Experience of GME in Primary.....	128
Transition to Secondary .....	130
GME in Other Subjects.....	133
Opportunities .....	133
Culture and Identity .....	134
Current Position of Gaelic, and the Gaelic Media .....	136
Chapter 5 Summary .....	139
<i>Chapter 6 – Parent Questionnaire .....</i>	<i>141</i>
Introduction.....	141
Parent Questionnaire Analysis and Commentary .....	143
Chapter 6 Summary of Findings .....	154
<i>Chapter 7 – Views of Head Teachers, Gaelic Teachers and Educationalists .....</i>	<i>156</i>
Distribution of Responses.....	156
Chapter 7 Summary .....	177
<i>Chapter 8 – Regeneration and Stewardship .....</i>	<i>180</i>
The Needs of Bilingual Pupils.....	182
Gaelic Language and Scottish Identity .....	183
Gaelic Revitalisation and Cultural Development.....	188

Gaelic in National Focus.....	194
Regenerative Approaches.....	198
<i>Chapter 9 – Conclusions and Recommendations.....</i>	<i>203</i>
Client Groups and Delivery Groups – A Final Word.....	203
Conclusions.....	210
Final Recommendations .....	214
<i>Appendix A: Pupil Questionnaire .....</i>	<i>216</i>
<i>Appendix B: Pupil Questionnaire Data .....</i>	<i>225</i>
Question 1 .....	225
Question 2 .....	226
Question 3 .....	227
Question 4 .....	228
Question 5 .....	232
Question 6 .....	233
Question 7 .....	234
Question 8 .....	235
Question 9a .....	236
Question 9b .....	237
Question 10 .....	238
Question 11 .....	239
Question 12 .....	245
Question 13 .....	246
Question 14 .....	247
Question 15 .....	248
Question 16 .....	252
Question 17 .....	255
Question 18 .....	256
Question 19 .....	257
Question 20 .....	259
Question 21 .....	260
Question 22 .....	264
Question 23 .....	267
Question 24 .....	268
Question 25 .....	269
Question 26 .....	270
Question 27 .....	271

<i>Appendix C: Parents' Questionnaire.....</i>	<i>275</i>
<i>Appendix D: Summary of Parent Responses.....</i>	<i>276</i>
<i>Appendix E: Schedule of Interview Questions for Teachers and Other Educationalists</i> <i>.....</i>	<i>286</i>
<i>Bibliography.....</i>	<i>287</i>

## Chapter 1 – Introduction to the Research

### *Aims*

The focus of the research is young people in their school and home environment, their teachers and parents and their experience of Gaelic-medium education. In contextualising my study I have drawn on existing academic research in the areas of identity, culture and language. My situational standpoint is in keeping with the ideas on language and identity expounded by Edwards (1985) Fishman, (in various publications) and Trudgill (2000). The work of anthropologists Frederik Barth (1969) and Anthony Cohen (1982, 2000) on identity, boundaries and the way groups interpret their cultural place in the scheme of things provides a prism through which ideas and insights from this research can be further explored. The research therefore is contextualised with the awareness that identity has a variety of contexts and that wider social and historical factors underpin concepts of culture and ethnic identity. In this thesis I tend to support the view expressed by Nagel, suggesting that ethnic identity is:

The result of a dialectical process involving internal and external opinions and processes, as well as the individual's self identification and outsiders' ethnic designations- i.e. what you think your ethnicity is, versus what they think your ethnicity is....Ethnic boundaries, and thus identities, are constructed by both the individual and the group as well as by the outside agents and organisations. <sup>1</sup>

This position lies between a situational selection of identity and imperatives imposed externally. Ethnic groups can therefore be seen instrumentally as specific interest groups, a resource, perhaps even a force under certain political conditions.

Ethnic histories and ascriptions can be *adopted* and *adapted* by individuals and/or groups according to the particular social and political aims being pursued at the time. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nagel, J. 1994 'Constructing ethnicity: creating and recreating ethnic identity and culture. *'Social Problems*, 1994, 41 – 154-155

<sup>2</sup> May, S. *Language and Minority Rights*, 2001: 36



In my research I was aware of the views emanating from academics on issues such as the extent to which language is a crucial marker of identity, the importance of language in giving a sense of peoplehood or nationhood and the contribution that language makes to a culture. The key questions posed by these researchers were of interest to me in considering the views of my research cohort and in interpreting their views within the broader educational and social framework of the islands and Scotland in the present day. Within this broader framework are factors such as the value that is placed both locally and nationally on the Gaelic language and culture and how these attitudes are perceived by the stakeholders involved in Gaelic-medium education. My understanding of the broader language and culture debates has been influenced by the work of Eagleton, (2000) and the research of MacDonald (1997). I align myself with her analysis that changes in a culture are not necessarily signs of incipient death throes for that culture but the fact that the numbers of Gaelic language speakers have severely declined brings into play the question of whether or not a culture can survive without a language.

In his attempt to find a meaningful definition of the concept of culture Eagleton suggests that it 'encodes a number of key philosophical issues,' and embraces 'questions of freedom and determinism, agency and endurance, change and identity.'<sup>3</sup> Although culture is only political within its historical dimension, for example in the role it played in cementing the nation state, there is a sense in which culture has been an entity that bonds people who feel uprooted, as happened with ethnic migration, or 'when the drastically shrinking world of transitional capitalism pitched life forms ever more eclectically together.'<sup>4</sup> In my research I hoped to consider the views of my respondents on their status in their changing environment as the beneficiaries of a minority language initiative whose intention was to reverse the language shift that was causing the decline of Gaelic. A key question would be how the pupils viewed their identity within their own communities and within the Scottish nation at a time when the mode of government was changing and the status of Gaelic was under scrutiny.

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<sup>3</sup> Eagleton T. *The Idea of Culture*, 2000: 2

<sup>4</sup>Ibid: 130

A further aim in conducting this research among young people in the Western Isles is to explore their views on their experience of Gaelic-medium education and the proposition that a sense of difference has emerged from a learning environment and other contexts in their environment. My research is also designed to explore the viewpoints of my informants on the veracity of this proposition and the extent to which identity issues have impinged on their awareness through their involvement with a Gaelic culture. Barth, (1969) notes, in his discussion on ethnic categories that, 'the features that are taken into account are not the sum of 'objective' differences but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant.'<sup>5</sup> Central to my research is the notion of the experience of 'being' Gaelic, and the significance of this to my survey group, not just in pedagogical terms but in terms of the role the Gaelic education experience may have in formulating their concept and understanding of their culture at a period when Gaelic appears to be in a state of flux. Simultaneously in decline, in terms numbers of speakers, and undergoing a process of revival in terms of the educational and social measures that have been taken on its behalf.

### ***Key Factors In Gaelic Decline***

Education in English was not the only factor in the decline of Gaelic but it was an element which was at play along with a combination of factors, for example outward and inward migration, and the spread of an industrialised economy. These all played a part in the decline in numbers of monoglot Gaelic speakers. Even as early as the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Gaelic had begun its retreat into the Highlands and was 'essentially rural, sustained by the clan system.'<sup>6</sup>

Clans were subsequently weakened after the Act of Privy Council passed by the Scottish government in 1616 to suppress Gaelic.<sup>7</sup> After Culloden military garrisons were created in the Highlands and the military presence further diluted Gaelic. The evictions and clearances which followed the Jacobite uprisings either removed or killed off Gaelic speakers.

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<sup>5</sup> Barth F. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 1969:14

<sup>6</sup> Grant, N. *Multicultural Education in Scotland*, 2000: 12

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 13

Both in city slums and in emigrant ships thousands of the people who fled the Highlands and Islands as a result of their evictions were to die of typhoid cholera and various other diseases to which their conditions made them vulnerable.<sup>8</sup>

Other factors such as transport improvements, the interest of intellectuals in studying the Highland savage and the advent of tourism, further contributed to the Highlander's acceptance of the need to conform to a more modern and less tribal life.

Cultural displacement is a crucial factor in the way Gaels interpret their sense of place in the larger scheme. Gaelic has declined significantly from a position where it was spoken throughout the whole of Scotland apart from the Northern Isles. Gradually the Anglicising influences in Scotland prevailed and the Highlands and Islands became the heartland, cut off from the industrial and economic developments of the lowlands. Bereft of an economically viable infrastructure, this area also became culturally distanced through language difference. There were almost 200,000 monoglot speakers located mostly in the Highlands and islands in the 1880s but within a century this had dropped to 80,000 who were bilingual. Historian Tom Devine notes the relatively rapid decline of Gaelic compared to other Celtic languages:

This decline in Scotland was paralleled to some extent in the nineteenth century in Ireland and Wales, but the collapse in Gaelic speaking in northern Scotland was much greater and more rapid than in either Wales or Ireland.<sup>9</sup>

Devine maintains that the forceful suppression of Gaelic was linked to a fear of a nationalistic movement. Citing the Statutes of Iona, he outlines the government rationale for displacing Gaelic as it was identified with 'barbarity and ignorance.' After the Jacobite uprisings of 1715 and 1745 the Society for the Propagating of Christian Knowledge sought to promote English as a way of subjugating Jacobite sympathisers. Devine further argues that:

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<sup>8</sup> Hunter, J. *Last of the Free*, 1999: 272

<sup>9</sup> Devine T. *Clanship to Crofter's War*, 1994: 111

The achievement of a unitary state and the absorption of the aberrant Gaelic society within the body politic demanded a single language and that had to be plain English.<sup>10</sup>

An unusual paradox existed by the nineteenth century that the Lowlanders who embraced an English model of outgoing industriousness still looked to the Highlands to preserve something of the lost Scottish markers of identity such as the Gaelic language and a romanticised idea of clanship. Customs and dress were redefined by romantic writers into:

an alluring myth for a society searching for an identity amid unprecedented economic and social change and under the threat of cultural conquest by its more powerful neighbour.<sup>11</sup>

The spread of commerce to scattered parts of Scotland and the opportunities for migrant work opened up the Gaelic speaking areas. By the time of the 1872 Education Act the developing role of English seemed to combine with a view that English was the language of the future and of success in terms of earning power. Gaelic was seen as:

a barrier to the progress and advancement of the Highland population. It might have a place in the home or in church but not in the vital business of education which prepared young people for jobs and careers.<sup>12</sup>

By the twentieth century however it had become clear that the decline in speakers had coincided with a parallel decline in the economy. In the past when the rest of Scotland had a vibrant industrial base, the decline would have been ignored but in a situation where the nature of Lowland industry was moving away from mercantile trade and heavy industry the Highlands began to be seen as a venue for possible economic growth. This coincided with a realisation that depopulation and language loss were detrimental to economic regeneration.

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Devine, T. *Clanship to Crofter's War*, 1994: 98

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 111

By the middle of the twentieth century there were attempts to deal with the issues surrounding Gaelic language preservation and some attention was given to educational issues surrounding Gaelic. Two studies were commissioned to assess the cognitive development of Gaelic speaking children. The first was issued by *An Comunn Gaidhealach* in 1936 and was based on responses by teachers and parents to questionnaires. The findings of this first study reveal that there was antipathy from parents in Inverness-shire about the teaching of Gaelic.

The majority of Gaelic speaking parents are averse to the speaking of Gaelic to their children; they discourage the use of it so that their children have very imperfect English and no Gaelic... Parents object to Gaelic as a waste of time.<sup>13</sup>

In native speaking areas however teachers were aware of the value of teaching through the medium of Gaelic. This first report therefore made recommendations 'urging an extension of the use of Gaelic and improvements in teaching methods.'<sup>14</sup>

A second report on the needs and difficulties of bilingual children in the Hebrides was conducted by Christina Smith on behalf of the Scottish Council for Research in Education. In her report it was acknowledged that:

The early imposition upon Gaelic speaking (and Gaelic thinking) children of English as the language of the schoolroom would appear to impede considerably progress in school subjects during the early years of the child's school life.<sup>15</sup>

Her report was commissioned because of concerns that Gaelic speaking children in the Hebrides were under scoring in IQ tests, perhaps because of their bilingualism. It was found that in tests the concepts presented to them were representations of lifestyles and

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<sup>13</sup> An Comunn Gaidhealach report on education, 1936, cited in MacKinnon, K. *Gaelic: A Past and Future Prospect*, 1991: 85

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Smith, Christina. *Mental Testing of Hebridean School Children in Gaelic and English*, 1948: 11

contexts of an English speaking world which were beyond their range of actual experience. Because it appeared that bilingual children were thus disadvantaged the report suggested:

There is a case for making more use of the Gaelic language as a teaching medium in schools in the Gaelic speaking districts.<sup>16</sup>

The external pressures of the outside world impinging on a hitherto isolated community were recognised in this report as having a bearing on the overall cognitive development of pupils. Testing pupils in English resulted in faulty assessments, yet without formal lessons in Gaelic pupils could not be tested in their own language. The report found that the assessment system was:

A serious reflection on the present educational system which demands from bilingual children the level of attainment recognised throughout the country as the requisite for promoting from primary to post- primary education.<sup>17</sup>

A primary school study, *Gaelic Speaking Children in Highland School*, published in 1961 revealed how widespread the practice of using English as a medium of teaching was even in Gaelic speaking areas.

At best, in a bilingual situation the school used Gaelic alongside English: at worst, it seldom used it at all, which only accelerated the process of Anglicisation in the *Gaidhealtachd*.<sup>18</sup>

It is also important to consider the broader context of social change which may have influenced and raised language preservation issues. In the post Second World War era there was more awareness of our world as a multicultural environment. Post-war migration and relocation resulted in displaced persons having to set up home in new countries and in new areas of their own country. Host areas had to assimilate different ethnicities and a key question in achieving this is whether or not to promote or suppress the minority languages

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 31

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 31

<sup>18</sup> Withers, C. *Gaelic in Scotland 1698-1981: The Geographical History of a Language*, 1984: 245

of displaced people. Like other migrants, Gaelic speakers who moved to lowland areas were subjected to racial generalisation, being addressed as 'Teuchters' and such like.

A number of different attitudinal positions have developed from the suggestion that certain languages prevent their speakers from developing beyond a primitive level of expression. Dorian (1988) notes for example that 'Western dominant language speakers will generally view minority languages with 'ignorance about the complexity and expressivity of indigenous languages.' <sup>19</sup> This also raises the question of whether a minority language can ever be instrumentally more useful than the more dominant and adaptable language. Do we carry a bias around with us based on our stereotyped view of the Gaelic language and the ideology that surrounds it as a primitive language? Trudgill (1974) drew attention to the role that social stratification and contexts had in allowing language forms to become more divergent. 'All languages are subject to social and stylistic differentiation.' <sup>20</sup> But outward migration of the professional classes, or those that were being educated for the professional class, together with lack of inward investment in new technologies, have tended to prevent technical and professional forms of Gaelic vocabulary from developing. Another factor in the erosion of confidence in the language and culture was that prior to the introduction of GME the policy of exporting secondary children from the Western Isles to mainland schools in order to improve their chances of achieving success in education contributed to a process of accelerated language loss in the very heartland of Gaeldom. The loss was not just that Gaelic speakers moved on, but that Gaelic was perceived by those left behind as being the language of the 'B' stream; of those who could not make it academically.

Population mobility has produced and will produce a new kind of citizenship. As nations become more multicultural, policies on education and language must become more inclusive. Countries with territorial minorities have recognised the rights of these people to teaching in their mother tongue, particularly in areas where language rights were creating political unrest. In more recent times it is the recognition of the economic needs of a global economy that has put bilingual language policies at the forefront of political agendas across Europe. In the United Kingdom there is a perception that we can get by with only

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<sup>19</sup> Dorian, N, Western Language Ideologies and Small Language Prospects, in *Endangered Languages*, Grenoble L. A. and Whaley, L. J. (eds) 1998:3-21

English, but this limits both internal communication with minority groups and external communication with other nations in participating in the global economy.

The trans-national economy, the post industrial society and the emergence of new kinds of 'international citizenship' collectively elevate language planning to central importance because the centres of world power and opportunity are diversifying. Knowing others on their own terms is increasingly a need as much as a value norm or principle.<sup>21</sup>

Assimilation of language minorities has become a buzzword of exponents of pluralism. In *Policy and Practice in Education*, Nigel Grant asks the question that minorities surely put to themselves:

To what should they assimilate? Is it to the part of Scotland they have come to or to the United Kingdom as a whole? There is an assumption that renouncing a cultural heritage is desirable or inevitable in order to become less markedly different.<sup>22</sup>

If our claims in Scotland to be a truly multicultural society are accurate then the diversity of languages is something that should be celebrated. A similar problem exists now within the islands as there are so many incoming non Gaelic speaking families who may have no allegiance to Gaelic language or culture. In a report in 1987 on the effectiveness of the measures put in place for bilingualism, such diverse factors as 'TV and out-dated attitudes' were identified as having a powerful adverse effect on Gaelic culture and pupil attitudes to speaking Gaelic. A further major negative force was 'change in the linguistic balance within communities, as increasing numbers of non-Gaelic speakers moved into the Western Isles.'<sup>23</sup>

In my research I have considered whether or not factors such as lack of confidence in a distinct Gaelic identity may have encouraged a residual mindset of English language

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<sup>20</sup> Trudgill, P. *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language in Society*, 1974: 27

<sup>21</sup> Lo Bianco, J. *Language and Literacy Policy in Scotland*, 2001: 15

<sup>22</sup> Grant, Nigel. *Multicultural Education in Scotland: Policy and Practice in education*, 2000: 19



superiority which has affected Gaelic-medium pupils or their parents. This has been examined in Chapters 4 and 5 of this research.

In my research I also expected pupils to have experienced at first hand what it has been like to have been singled out from the mainstream and it will be interesting to establish whether or not they perceive their Gaelic culture to be accepted within the educational context of secondary school.

### ***Bilingual Education Project in the Western Isles: Phase 1***

The Bilingual Education Project in the Western Isles began just after the Western Isles Council, *Comhairle nan Eilean Siar* was set up in 1975. As the local authority was itself new there was a sense in which the bilingual project was viewed as innovative. This had positive and negative effects. Some of the public regarded innovation with deep suspicion. There was a popular Gaelic song at the time entitled *Comhairle nan Eilean* lampooning the efforts of the new council in general. Also although there was a heightened awareness of Gaelic culture on the mainland, known by the eighties as a Gaelic renaissance movement and which ran parallel to the Western Isles Gaelic initiatives, island parents were not by nature 'pushy' about their expectations of schools and were not proactive at the early stages of bilingual schooling. It is actually difficult to say when and where the so called Gaelic renaissance originated but the 1960's there was evidence of a cultural awakening.

The 1960s clearly mark a new phase which might be regarded as the beginnings of what has become the present Gaelic renaissance: the attempt to define Gaelic as the language of Scotland and to do something about it, and the interlinking of Gaelic and Scottish nationalism.<sup>24</sup>

The task, therefore, of those who introduced bilingual education to the Western Isles was to convert parents to the new ideas of promoting their own language in education. Traditionally, local parents were reticent in their attitudes to schools and were inclined to

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<sup>23</sup> Mitchell, R. et al., *Report of an Independent Evaluation of the Western Isles Bilingual Education Project*, 1987: 176

<sup>24</sup> . Macdonald, S. 1999, 'The Gaelic Renaissance and Scottish Identities,' *Scottish Affairs*, 26: 100-118.

leave it all to teachers. One of the ways of overcoming this was to use the child's local environment as a teaching resource. Accordingly, one of the stated aims of primary school education as outlined in the study, '*Bilingual Primary Education in the Western Isles*,' by John Murray and Catherine Morrison was to acknowledge the broader language environment of the pupils beyond the classroom. In this way it was hoped that their Gaelic language environment would be accepted and acknowledged through formal language education and it was hoped that there would be a move away from the accepted premise that 'strength in Gaelic was regarded as weakness in English.'<sup>25</sup>

This view, sometimes known as a language deficit model, has permeated the thinking of parents and dates back to a period prior to the setting up of the Western Isles as a Council in its own right. The key to educational advancement was achievement in English so that after the eleven plus examination, education could be continued on the mainland. In my surveys of the views of parents, teachers and pupils I hope in the following chapters to assess the extent to which Gaelic- medium and national initiatives have, in the minds of the groups dealt with in my research, overtaken or reversed the trend towards English dominance.

Because team members would be fully stretched with the operational matters of developing the project through the primary school stages in a rolling programme over three years, it was decided that evaluation would be formative and take the form of continuous overall assessment.

Teachers were encouraged to devise units of work based on environmental studies as it was felt that the language of the outdoors would be more familiar and experiential and would generate questioning and discussion and promote skills of research and interpretation, and recording of experience. The project leaders reported very positive teacher responses:

The sense of vigour and creative energy which characterised the best of the bilingual schooling which occurred within many of the project schools was

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<sup>25</sup> Murray, J. and Morrison, C. *Bilingual Primary Education in the Western Isles*, 1984: 16

akin to and on a par with the highest quality of accepted practice in the country.<sup>26</sup>

One drawback, however, was that the remit of the Bilingual Project team did not include utilising parents formally in a supportive role. There were in fact no formal links with parents, and with hindsight, this was a missed opportunity to capitalise on parental knowledge and expertise of the language and the environment. It also left parents in relative ignorance of the aims of the project and the new teaching methods being adopted. Parents, therefore, did not fully understand the process of bilingual language acquisition and tended to expect schools to compensate when their children experienced a language shift (towards English) when entering school. This was raised in an evaluative study by parents who were asked to comment on changes in primary education since they had been in school. Speaking English in the playground instead of Gaelic was identified as a major change but parents also felt that Gaelic within the classroom had transformed the learning experience and many parents were accepting that they themselves had a responsibility to promote use of Gaelic in the home.<sup>27</sup>

As early as 1965 it had been recommended in a memorandum published by the Scottish Education Department *Primary Education in Scotland*:

that children be urged to look more closely at the environment and through observation and exploration, to isolate, identify and understand the various aspects of his environmental experiences and to develop the language he needs to describe them.<sup>28</sup>

Although the child centred approach was a recommended strategy, it had not been adopted before in a bilingual setting. Rather than use Gaelic as a bridge to acquiring English teachers had to adopt the approach recommended by Bruce Gaarder, a socio-linguistic scholar, of aiming to produce:

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<sup>26</sup> Murray, J and Morrison C. *Bilingual Primary Education in the Western Isles*, 1984: x & xi

<sup>27</sup> Mitchell, R. et al. *Report of an Independent Evaluation of the Gaelic Medium Bilingual Project*, 1987: 184

<sup>28</sup> SED, HMSO. *Primary Education in Scotland*, 1965: 126

Gaelic/English bilinguals with a mastery of the skills of understanding, speaking, reading and writing in both languages together with an appreciation of the nuances, emotional overtones and cultural dimensions of the two languages.<sup>29</sup>

## ***Bilingual Education Project in the Western Isles: Phase 2***

The second phase of the project between 1978 and 1981 aimed to strengthen the planning and implementation of a bilingual curriculum across a wider spectrum. By this time there was a growing feeling from teachers that whatever the merits of a bilingual approach, it would not offset the rapid decline in Gaelic fluency. The emerging difficulty of trying to cope with the task of a bilingual approach was described even by the then Director of Education as a 'juggling act' for teachers. Some were enthusiastic, but the question remained that giving equal status to Gaelic and English was not going far enough,

Some thought that the project's chances of success were limited since the language was in decline among children and they believed that parents and the media were to blame for this.<sup>30</sup>

In summing up the value of the Bilingual Project it has to be said that it helped to develop a more relevant curriculum in keeping with recommended best practice elsewhere and that it worked towards fulfilling this aim of the Western Isles council's Bilingual Policy:

...to enable children from a Gaelic speaking background to become literate and competent in the use of both Gaelic and English to a level comparable with that achieved in English by their peers elsewhere in the country, and to provide adequate facilities throughout the school for children from a non-Gaelic speaking background to learn Gaelic as a second Language.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Gaarder, B. 'Organisation of the Bilingual School' in *Journal of Social Issues*, 1976: No.2, vol 23, pp 110-126

<sup>30</sup> Murray, J. and Morrison, C. *Bilingual Primary Education*, 1984: 102

John Murray and Catherine Morrison concluded that there was a considerable need for consolidation and teacher support and that the project team had made considerable gains in building up a rapport with teachers. Perhaps because of its limitations the project did much to highlight the need for a more robust and confident approach. This was to follow as the Gaelic- medium initiative.

By the end of the second phase the achievements of the bilingual project could be summed up as follows. It had raised parental awareness, there was a growing confidence among teachers about the viability of teaching through the medium of Gaelic and colleges had begun to address bilingual training needs of teachers. In addition there had been several beneficial spin offs in pedagogic terms such as the realisation of the need to produce customised Gaelic reading schemes. The BBC collaborated in serialising Gaelic translations of English works of fiction on their schools programmes. The widespread success of some of the material published within a few years of the inception of the Bilingual Project schools led to the setting up in Stornoway of a bilingual publishing company, Acair Ltd. in 1977.

These developments occurred at a time when teaching methodology was taking more account in general of the importance of the child's background and experience. The bilingual team however still operated from a language acquisition construct that weighted English as of parallel importance to Gaelic.

The team was of the opinion that the role of Gaelic in school should be as a tool for learning and describing experience. By using their *two* (my emphasis) languages as media of exploration of the world about them their learning would be enriched.<sup>32</sup>

The positive report of Murray and Morrison (1984) was later endorsed by the Independent Evaluative Study (1987). Other researchers were also noting what was happening on the Gaelic scene. In his comments on the 1987 evaluative study Kenneth MacKinnon reported

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<sup>31</sup> Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. *Bilingual Policy*, 1977: para 3.1

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 90

that 'the language development of children had benefited and there was no evidence of any negative linguistic effects.'<sup>33</sup>

It is important to see the bilingual project work in the context for which it was devised, that is as part of the development of a national primary education policy. In itself it did not set out to salvage Gaelic although this aim was central to the beliefs and values of many of the teachers and parents. It was noted in the independent evaluative study that, 'There was clearly an implicit aim of language maintenance- but this was never explicitly stated.'<sup>34</sup>

Hence it was very difficult to make claims regarding any impact bilingual methods were having on reversing trends of language loss. What did become clear however was that the Bilingual Education Project was achieving its stated aim of equal use of Gaelic and English for the complete range of functions for which language was required but there was one caveat:

This objective was realised where fluent Gaelic speakers were in the majority. Where these were in the minority and amongst the pupils who were less fluent, the use of Gaelic in teaching and learning was much reduced.<sup>35</sup>

There was an assumption in the evaluative report of 1987 that school policy on Gaelic could compensate for the apparent language shift taking place in communities. The report showed that older primary children who had been exposed to more Gaelic use in school had more fluency. The report recommended therefore that:

Where language shift is taking place in the community, decisions about language policy in the schools take on extra importance, as the classroom is the main place in children's lives where exposure to Gaelic can be systematically provided.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> MacKinnon, K. *The Present Position of Gaelic in Primary Education*, 1983:16: 3.3, 31

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> MacKinnon, K. *The Present Position of Gaelic in Primary Education*, 1983: 3.3, 32

<sup>36</sup> Mitchell, R. et al., *Report of an Independent Evaluation of the Western Isles Bilingual Education Project*, 1987: 192

The Bilingual Project in the Western Isles served a very useful purpose in bringing to light many of the teething troubles of implementing a partial Gaelic immersion programme. There were many parental concerns and it seemed that a bilingual approach was not satisfactory either from the standpoint of natives who felt that bilingual teaching diluted their children's Gaelic, or from the perspective of non Gaelic families who felt that too much emphasis was being placed on Gaelic. Teachers were faced with many challenges because there was a huge variation in the bilingual competence of the intake into primary one.

As yet the philosophy of full immersion had not taken root. The Murray and Morrison report *Bilingual Primary Education* concluded rather lamely that there was a need for a sustained programme to develop teaching of Gaelic as a *second* language.<sup>37</sup>

The report highlighted one of the main difficulties in assessing the needs of Gaelic speaking pupils, namely, in establishing their baseline use of Gaelic. This was an issue taken up in subsequent research. Alasdair Roberts had noted in his report, on parental attitudes to Gaelic-medium Education in the Western Isles that: 'Only 39% of pupils in the Western Isles are approaching school age from homes where Gaelic is normally spoken.'<sup>38</sup> His report was an attempt to gauge opinion about broadening the scope of the bilingual approach to create immersion classes. His questionnaires and interviews established that 71% of parents were in favour of Gaelic-medium education.

For those parents who wished to make the choice for Gaelic however the Roberts report pointed out that there was a great deal of goodwill towards the language.

There is furthermore a quite general agreement (which extends well beyond native-speakers) that during the early years when language is being acquired, Western Isles children should be encouraged to learn Gaelic.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Murray, J. and Morrison, C. *Bilingual Primary Education*, 1984: 162

<sup>38</sup> Roberts, A. *Parental Attitudes to Gaelic Medium Education in the Western Isles* cited in *Spotlights* No. 24, 1990a:2

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid* : 6

Parents who had already experienced the bilingual approach could see the limitations both in what was happening in school and in their communities and this type of statement strengthened the case for Gaelic-medium.

...the bilingual policy has not worked in practice, the evidence of this is that a village like ours where fifteen years ago Gaelic was the language of the majority of children, now it is the language of hardly anyone once they start school. That's why we support Gaelic-medium education.<sup>40</sup>

### ***The Inception of GME***

At first glance it is clear from existing studies that the desire for GME came initially from concerns raised by parents and teachers about the limitations of bilingual education projects in schools in the Western Isles and other areas. The numbers of children speaking Gaelic as their mother tongue did not increase in the period of the existence of the bilingual project despite the fact that in the Western Isles the independent study of the project conducted by Stirling University on behalf of the SED concluded that it had been 'a substantial success... in influencing the nature of pupils experience in schools.'<sup>41</sup>

Trends in the 1981 census figures had seemed to indicate a global increase nationally in numbers of children who were Gaelic speakers. This is attributed to a new spirit of optimism about Gaelic revival and a hope for economic upturn in the Highlands and Islands.

The attitudes of fatalism are rapidly becoming part of history. Why so fundamental change might have occurred is by no means clear, though it may be pertinent to note that it accords with a general concern for a cultural identity apparent throughout Europe, and indeed on a global scale over the past fifteen

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<sup>40</sup> Roberts, A. *Parental Attitudes to Gaelic Medium Education in the Western Isles*, 1990b: 17

<sup>41</sup> Mitchell, R. et al. *Report of an Independent Evaluation of the Western Isles Bilingual Project*, 1987: 193



years. It also accords with an upturn in living standards in the Highlands and a gradual revival in community confidence.<sup>42</sup>

New bodies such as Comunn na Gàidhlig, the umbrella group for Gaelic developments (CNAG), the Gaelic learners association (CLI,) and Comhairle nan Sgoiltean Araich, the pre-school support group, (CNSA) gave Gaelic speakers platforms to air their views on issues such as Gaelic-medium schooling.

In 1982 the national promotional agency for pre school education was set up, Comhairle nan Sgoiltean Araich, (CNSA) and this resulted in more publicity for the issues being raised by parents. The Gaelic Play Groups Association, initially a parent led initiative, had done much to raise awareness of the threat posed to Gaelic by the dominance of English. It was outwith the islands on the mainland of Scotland that the initiative was taken by two local authorities in 1985 to introduce Gaelic-medium units, one in Inverness and one in Glasgow.

This new activism on the part of mainland parents took place against a backdrop of other developments such as a campaign for Gaelic road signage. There were also positive developments such as the presentation of a Parliamentary Bill to improve the status and provision of the language and the setting up of the new Gaelic body, Comunn na Gàidhlig (CNAG) which would co-ordinate the work of other bodies and promote Gaelic. At national level in education, the Consultative Committee on the Curriculum set up another group, the Committee on Gaelic (COG) to advise on Gaelic education. There was also a Joint Working Party on Gaelic set up to advise on secondary school provision. National Development Officers were given the task of developing appropriate course materials for secondary pupils.

Running parallel with these initiatives, the Gaelic College in Skye, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig was beginning to have an impact as a centre for learning. Having initially focussed on community and cultural events it established in 1987 a full time HND course in Business Management and Gaidhealtachd Studies taught through the medium of Gaelic.

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<sup>42</sup> MacArthur, John M. M. et al. *Cor na Gàidhlig: Language, Community and Development: The Gaelic Situation*, 1982: 8.01

In the Western isles the first GM unit to be set up was in Lewis in Breasclate in 1986. In the same year the Gaelic Specific Grants Scheme allowed additional funding to be released from central government provide resources such as staff support books and materials. Teachers were supported by advisorate level Primary and Secondary Review Groups of the Western Isles a few of the local authorities involved.

To circumvent the problems of the lack of available reading schemes in Gaelic, much of the teaching was to be based on using the natural environment as a teaching resource. In this way it was hoped that teachers may be able to capitalise on the locality itself as a resource and the people within it. The Gaelic-medium programme in the Western Isles was designed to provide total immersion for the first two years. It was believed that approach would cater for the non native pupil and encourage the native speaker. GM pupils are taught entirely in Gaelic up to primary 2, oral English is introduced in the third year, in primary 4 the principal targets in mathematics are also dealt with through the medium of English. And by primary 7, 'a balanced bilingual approach permeates' <sup>43</sup> This is in contrast with Highland Council where the practice is to use Gaelic as the oral medium of teaching until primary seven in the key subjects of Maths, Science and English language although pupils read and write in English from primary 3. The contrast in approach is probably based on an assumption that within the Western Isles the designated bilingual stream would provide a supportive environment for the Gaelic-medium stream beyond primary two as there would be more pupils in the schools with a knowledge of Gaelic. In real terms however the non GM class is increasingly being recognised as mainstream English medium. A bilingual approach cannot be maintained where parents have no Gaelic and where teachers have no Gaelic. Practice will vary from school to school but there is the distinct impression that the choice is either Gaelic-medium or nothing. The Western Isles has recently revealed plans to designate four small schools as Gaelic-medium schools as the success of the Gaelic-medium primary school in Glasgow has indicated that a totally Gaelic environment in the whole school, not just in one or two classrooms, provides a much better immersion environment.

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<sup>43</sup> Bilingual Policy Implementation Review pp 3-4 cited in . D J MacLeod in *Gaelic Medium Education, Policy and Practice in Education* Nicoloson and MacIver , (eds), vol 10 2003: 8

In 1988 first Gaelic medium children in Glasgow went to Hillpark secondary. Secondary education in discrete subjects in Gaelic is dependent on availability of Gaelic speaking teachers so development has been uneven. Shortage of teachers at primary and secondary level has been a major constraint since the inception of GME and there has not been a great development of Gaelic-medium teaching across the secondary school curriculum. A possible reason for this is the fact that policy is so weakly articulated in local authorities, including the Western isles and based on reacting to parental demand for Gaelic-medium. Even if a demand is expressed it would be subject to practical conditions such as availability of accommodation, funding and staff. The weakness of the system seems to lie in the fact that the onus is put on parents to articulate their children's educational needs rather than the education system being proactive in and innovative in bringing the opportunities for secondary bilingual education to the attention of parents.

In their paper on the development of provision of Gaelic, published in *Gaelic in Education*, Catriona Dunn and Boyd Robertson make reference to the impact that parents had in securing Gaelic-medium provision and to their awareness of the deficiencies of a bilingual approach. This was a sign at least that parents were being encouraged to express views on Gaelic education and consider the future of the language:

Island parents were obviously not convinced that the balance of Gaelic and English in bilingual teaching programmes was sufficient to counter the pervasive influence of English outside the classroom.<sup>44</sup>

The 1981 census previously mentioned had also shown that numbers of Gaelic speakers had slightly increased among teenagers in the Highlands and Islands.<sup>45</sup> This was perhaps due to Gaelic speaking parents returning to their heartland to take up employment in the wake of the newly established local authorities. It was hoped that enhanced provision of Gaelic education would further swell the numbers. There is evidence from census analysis that Gaelic provision did play a positive role.

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<sup>44</sup> Dunn, C. M. and Robertson, A.G.B. *Gaelic in Education*, cited in Gillies, W. 1989: 44

If areas with primary Gaelic teaching schemes before 1981 are compared with those without, it can be shown that there occurred a proportional increase of Gaelic speakers in the 5-9 age group, a numerical and proportional increase in the 10-14 age group and a numerical increase in 15-19 year olds which can be attributed specifically to those areas with primary Gaelic teaching schemes.<sup>46</sup>

By the time of the 1991 census however it was clear that there had been a drop in the figures of Gaelic speakers in the Western Isles in the 3 to 15 age group from 68% to 49%.<sup>47</sup> This figure served to emphasise what had been considered by many parents and teachers to have been the case over the years that bilingual initiatives of themselves had not resulted in securing an increase in the numbers of native speakers. The onus would be on Gaelic-medium education to perform a significant role in stemming language loss in the communities. By 1998 Western Isles Council was educating 643 pupils through the medium of Gaelic.<sup>48</sup> Current statistics issued by the council show that 62% of primary schools have GME units educating 26% of children.

With the uptake at 26% too few parents are choosing Gaelic-medium and the language environment within schools and in communities appears to be too impoverished and diluted to sustain a Gaelic recovery. It should also be borne in mind that census figures are based on self reporting of the respondents' position on Gaelic. The census questions in themselves did not purport to interpret levels of fluency or confidence in the use of language.

In a report in 1992 Kenneth MacKinnon reflected on the downward path of Gaelic and noted that, 'many, including Gaelic speakers themselves, have taken a fatalistic attitude to this, and felt nothing could be done about it.'<sup>49</sup> The parlous state of Gaelic use and the lack of parental awareness of the value of bilingualism were reflected trenchantly in one

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<sup>45</sup> MacKinnon, K. *A Century on the Census, Gaelic in Twentieth Century Focus*, 2000: 4 (<http://www2.arts.gla.ac.uk/www/english/comet/starn/lang/gaelic/focus.htm>, accessed 3/4/00)

<sup>46</sup> MacKinnon, K. *The Present Position of Gaelic in Scottish Primary Education*, 1987: 35

<sup>47</sup> *General Register Office Scotland 1991 Census*, HMSO

<sup>48</sup> General Teaching Council. *Teaching in Gaelic Medium Education*, 1999: 3.2.2

<sup>49</sup> MacKinnon, K. *An Aghaidh na Creag: Against Adversity – Gaeldom's Twentieth Century Survival and Potential*, 1992: 1.2

comment a parent made in the 1990 Roberts report. 'I would be delighted if my daughter learned Gaelic as long as it did not interfere with her education.' <sup>50</sup>

Over the space of the following ten years not much had changed if the statistics of GM uptake can be taken as an indicator. In a paper on Gaelic revival, Wilson McLeod pointed out that, 'even today, the overwhelming majority of primary school children in the islands' schools, (70 %) receive their education through the medium of English.' <sup>51</sup>

This pattern, perceived by some such as Wilson McLeod as a language shift, would be apparent in the development of Gaelic-medium units in the Western Isles as it became clear that native speaking parents would not always make the choice for Gaelic-medium. (To date the numbers opting for Gaelic-medium have not changed significantly, although 'uptake nationally has shown a gradual upward trend and there are now 60 Gaelic units in 14 local authorities.'<sup>52</sup>) A factor which will affect both Gaelic-medium education and the prospects for Gaelic language preservation is the general trend of population decline within the Western isles.

### ***Monitoring the Progress of GME***

The development of Gaelic-medium education took place in a climate of growing awareness of the accelerating decline in the numbers of speakers, and the dilution of the traditional culture. In the broader context of the Europe lesser used languages and the language interests of minorities had been given prominence by the inception in 1982 of the European Bureau of Lesser Used Languages, which was instrumental in setting up a powerful lobby of exchange for minority language groups. Within ten years the European Charter for Minority Languages had been launched, emphasising again that groups and minorities could develop a powerful voice in Europe, reinforcing their ethnic differences through language. There were simultaneous initiatives in the French speaking parts of Canada to reverse a perceived loss of language and French identity in the state of Quebec.

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<sup>50</sup> Roberts, A. *Parental Attitudes to Gaelic Medium Education in the Western Isles*, 1990b: 5

<sup>51</sup> McLeod, W. *Gaelic in Scotland: A Renaissance Without Planning*, 1999: 5

<sup>52</sup> Nisbet, J. 'A Local Authority Perspective' cited in *Gaelic Medium Education*,. Nicolson, M. and MacIver, M. 2003: 54

The reviews by Swain and Lapkin (1982) and Genessee, (1984, 1987) of the research into immersion programmes in Canada showed that immersion students learning French as a second language (L2) showed the same or better achievements than other pupils whose first language was French (L1). Concerns about a drastic language shift which may lead to the death of Gaelic resulted in research being commissioned on trends of language loss. In order to gauge the efficacy of a range of initiatives on behalf of Gaelic, Richard Johnstone reviewed some indicators of language shift which have been documented in other studies and drew parallels with Gaelic. In his conclusions he focused on socio-economic and demographic factors. A significant factor in the shift from monoglot Gaelic to loss of Gaelic was the loss of confidence which came about through social networking in English through the influx of newcomers into the Hebrides:

The local inhabitants perhaps lacked the confidence and self-esteem (and perhaps were simply too polite) to keep speaking their language in the presence of these important new persons and thereby did not create the conditions in which the newcomers would feel motivated to learn Gaelic in order to fit in.’<sup>53</sup>

In my research similar issues of confidence in the use of language in front of strangers have been considered in Chapter 5.

One of the major difficulties in the process of attempting to reverse a language loss, which persisted in the Gaelic-medium setting, was the fact that children who were from a native background (L1 maintenance) were in the same groups as children who were new to Gaelic (L2 immersion.)<sup>54</sup> Johnstone acknowledged that this would pose problems for teachers but also stressed that this could be potentially enriching. Each school would have to approach the problem from its own context and devise a model for achieving the best in language development.

The advantage resides in the fact that in the class there is more than one model of Gaelic speaker, so the Gaelic-as-L2 immersion children can interact in

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<sup>53</sup> Johnstone, R. *The Impact of Current Developments to Support the Gaelic Language*, 1994: 11

<sup>54</sup> Ibid: 48

Gaelic not only with their Gaelic speaking teacher but also with their Gaelic-as-L1 classmates.<sup>55</sup>

In many cases the introduction of English varies according to local circumstances and the alternative to Gaelic is now locally known as English medium or mainstream rather than bilingual. In the 1994 report Johnstone felt that there were many questions about Gaelic medium still to be answered, e.g.,

What are the effects on children's linguistic and other development of mixing L1 maintenance and L2 immersion children in one class? What processes of teaching and learning actually take place in the different models of bilingual teaching including Gaelic medium? What will be the implications for primary school GM children of not being able to anticipate follow-through in GM education in secondary other than Gaelic as a subject?' <sup>56</sup>

The views of parents on the effectiveness of Gaelic-medium were sought and published in a study by Morag MacNeil. These findings made reference to the value that Gaelic-medium had beyond the confines of the classroom,

Parents considered that the GMU's benefited the community in a variety of ways e.g. giving confidence to adult speakers of Gaelic to start conversation with their children and grandchildren; heightening the confidence of the Gaelic speaking community generally.<sup>57</sup>

This report also outlined possible areas of concern as being levels of staffing, provision of Gaelic at secondary, timing and manner of the shift from total immersion to bilingual and the manner of introduction of English. In my research I questioned pupils regarding their views on these acknowledged areas of concern as I regarded it as interesting to consider the experiences that pupils recollect of their early days of Gaelic-medium and their progress towards secondary transition.

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 48

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 57

The progress of the implementation of Gaelic-medium education is documented in the Report, *The Attainments of Pupils Receiving Gaelic-Medium Primary Education*. A team headed by Professor Richard Johnstone led the compilation of this report, commissioned by the Scottish Office in 1999. Prior to the report, fears had been expressed that prolonging Gaelic as a medium of education would seriously impair the pupils' cognitive development in general as English language development would be affected.<sup>58</sup>

The Johnstone report made use of evidence from 5 to 14 Assessment in three subjects, English, Mathematics and Science, to evaluate the progress made by children in Gaelic-medium units. Other evidence came from tests conducted under the Assessment of Achievement Programme (AAP.) This was a method of providing detailed information across a wide range of outcomes and strands but the results would not be meaningful in the sense of reporting on individual pupils. The tests however gave information on national trends and on sub groups, gender variables and indicators such as free school meals index. However, as the report pointed out it was not possible to state with any accuracy whether a child emerging from Gaelic-medium acquires a larger store of language in one or other of the languages.<sup>59</sup> But what was evident though was that pupils from a Gaelic-medium background were not disadvantaged. The study found:

That Gaelic medium pupils generally perform better than their English medium counterparts, but that science is one exception to this.<sup>60</sup>

The lower rating in science could be attributed to the lack of scientific terminology in Gaelic or the lack of familiarity on the part of the teachers with scientific terminology.

The conclusions of the report included a comment on the importance of looking at the role of the secondary school in relation to Gaelic.

There is a strong case for further monitoring of the impact of Gaelic-medium primary education on pupils' subsequent learning at secondary school all the way through to Standard Grade at least.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> MacNeil, M. 1993a *Parental Experience of Gaelic Medium Schooling*, cited in Johnstone R. 1994: 49

<sup>58</sup> Mitchell, R. et al. *Report of an Independent Evaluation of the Western Isles Bilingual Project*, 1987:

<sup>59</sup> Johnstone, R. *The Attainments of Pupils Receiving Gaelic Medium Primary Education in Scotland*, 1999:



A significant finding was that children absorb the use of languages into their lives according to what is culturally appropriate. 'In this way the languages tend to complement each other rather than compete.' <sup>62</sup> The report also points out that although the aim of Gaelic-medium is to take the pupil beyond 'functional diglossia' the study did not have access to in school and out of school data in order to make comparisons.

The 1999 Johnstone report also considered contextual factors from the home, school and community. The report acknowledges that demographic trends have influenced the implementation of Gaelic-medium policies. One significant characteristic of the 1991 census which it pointed out was that,

The geographical distribution was quite widespread with more speakers scattered through Strathclyde than there were residents in the Western Isles. <sup>63</sup>

A possible benefit to pupils in the Western Isles however was that parental attitudes to Gaelic were becoming very positive on the mainland and informed comment from parents whose children were in the urban setting was emanating from regions which had introduced Gaelic-medium education. The Strathclyde émigrés who had left the islands were now a sizeable force moving up the social ladder and asserting their wishes for Gaelic education. There was now less concern about whether or not a pupil had parents who could speak Gaelic. The distribution of Gaelic speakers and those who wanted to acquire Gaelic on the mainland became an important factor in Gaelic development.

Parental activism was not strong as the Gaelic activities in a school were peripheral to the schools as a whole. Parents were from diverse backgrounds and at different levels of competency and fluency in Gaelic. Some of the difficulties in establishing the progress made by Gaelic-medium pupils have also been outlined in this report. In the section on family background some of the variables of family background which affect assessment of progress are outlined:

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 2

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 71

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 18

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 6

It is well known that there is not a one to one relationship between families that speak (and regularly use) Gaelic and families whose children participate in Gaelic-medium education.<sup>64</sup>

The drawbacks are however outweighed by the language and cultural advantages:

First it poses problems in that they have to cope with different levels of fluency in their class. Second, on the other hand, it offers a possible benefit for those children who have not acquired a language before coming to primary school, in that they will hear fluent Gaelic, not only from their teacher but also from some of their classmate. Third, pupils will benefit from the added value of becoming bilingual and bicultural.’<sup>65</sup>

What is significant is that there was sufficient interest in producing a report and that the findings, which were in the main positive, began to percolate into the consciousness of parents. At the same time research into immersion programmes in places such as Quebec were showing the same positive results from programmes that had been in place since the original immersion project in St Lamberts, Quebec which educated English speaking children in French. Genesee (1988) notes that ‘Since the St Lambert project immersion has become a common form of education English language children participating in these programmes did not experience any long term deficits in native language development or academic experience.’<sup>66</sup>

### ***The Role of Parents***

The important but role of parents of GM children has been highlighted in various reports, Mitchell et al (1987), Roberts 1990, and MacNeil 1993a, but attention was also drawn to

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 7

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 8

<sup>66</sup> Genesee, F., The Canadian Second Language Education Programme, in *Policy and Practice in Bilingual Education*, Garcia O, and Baker, C. (eds) 1995:129

the fact that parents in the Western Isles could not easily find a supportive role for themselves:

Despite the priority given to parental involvement there seems to have been some vagueness both about the means by which parents might be involved and the role they might play.<sup>67</sup>

Roberts felt that parents were supportive of Gaelic education but were not always clear about its aims. According to the Mitchell et al report, the two key areas of concern expressed by parents were that the cognitive development of their children would be adversely affected by immersion in Gaelic and that parents would be out of their depth and not able to operate in a partnership with schools and in a supportive role.

In a further report MacNeil drew attention to the different perceptions that teachers and parents had of partnership:

A very powerful barrier existed when it came to the idea of a classroom based partnership for the enhancement of Gaelic fluency. Only a small number (of parents) felt confident about their contribution to language through conversation story telling and listening to children reading. They were unsure of the crucial skills which they possessed could be extended into a teaching context within a classroom setting.<sup>68</sup>

One initiative pursued by the Western Isles Council was the Home Visit Schemes designed to raise awareness of GME within the community in 1989 and 1998. These initiatives were in response to requests for more information on the current status and future prospects of Gaelic-medium. In the scheme volunteer parents provided information on Gaelic-medium and Gaelic broadcasting to parents thinking of opting for Gaelic-medium education. There was no follow up arrangement however to either of these schemes but they seem to have served a purpose in raising awareness and 'marketing' Gaelic medium. The 1998-99 report, recommended that:

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<sup>67</sup> Mitchell, R. et al. *Report of an Independent Evaluation of the Western Isles Bilingual Project*, 1987: 173

A strategic educational plan, taking cognisance of the views of parents and teachers be devised to dispel any misconceptions about Gaelic medium education and instil confidence in the system.<sup>69</sup>

The insights from these reports have provided an overview of some of the key issues confronting parents who opted for Gaelic-medium education for their children. In addition to the role played by parents I have in my research considered the perceptions that secondary pupils have about their own use of language in school and in other environments and whether or not they are happy with their choice of it as a secondary subject. I have also considered their views of the way that the secondary school experience articulates with the aims of the primary school as the receptivity, motivation and level of application will be influenced by the status that is accorded to Gaelic in secondary. I have tried to establish the extent to which they are affected by any difference they perceive in the cultural acceptance of Gaelic in secondary. The views of parents on these issues will also add an interesting perspective to this evaluation of GME in the Western Isles. This notion of the role of parents was explored in my research in a questionnaire submitted to parents to ascertain whether or not these fears are replicated in the minds of some of the parents involved in GME in the Western Isles, see Chapter 6.

## ***Chapter 1 Summary***

In this chapter I have considered effects that historical factors have had on the Gaelic language and on the experiences of Gaelic-medium pupils. I have traced the development and limitations of the bilingual initiative and the advent of GME in the Western Isles. In addition I have considered the important lessons that have to be learned in terms of future language planning from research studies on language immersion conducted on behalf of the Gaelic community in the Western Isles and Scotland.

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<sup>68</sup> MacNeil, M. *Report on the Interaction of Parents and the Community with their Gaelic Medium Units*. 1993d, cited in Johnstone 1994: 51

<sup>69</sup> Comunn na Gàidhlig. *Home Visiting Scheme Western Isles: 1998-99, 1999*

## Chapter 2 – Research Foci

In the next sections I will review some of the broader areas of interest which my study encompasses in order to provide a perspective on the factors which were to have a bearing on the experience of Gaelic-medium education. The Gaelic community in the Western Isles who are included in this study, the parents, educationalists and pupils are the key stakeholders of the Gaelic-medium initiative. The perceived status of Gaelic is important in determining whether or not the community will embrace the language or reject it. Gaelic education encompasses issues of culture and identity as the survival of the language and the other elements coexist in an axis of inter-dependence. The status of Gaelic leads into the discussion on theoretical issues of language, culture and identity which are developed and explored in this chapter.

### ***Status of Gaelic***

An issue which I thought would be worth consideration is the notion of prestige and value of Gaelic and the way that this concept of status has emerged in minority language research generally. Fishman asserted that the process of reversing language shift appeals, ‘because it is part of the process of re-establishing local options, local control, local hope and local meaning to life.’<sup>70</sup> Locality involvement is dependent also on the perception that communities have of the importance of their language relative to the dominant language and therefore my research is important in providing another dimension to the evaluations of the success of Gaelic medium education. There is a symbiosis between language choice and language status. My interest was to determine how pupils and parents saw Gaelic against a broader backdrop rather than just considering its academic value.

I considered that pupils as they rise through the school system and take more interest in their own learning would have a viewpoint on the status of Gaelic compared to English and other subjects on the curriculum. Recent research into Welsh education has used the notion of subject popularity as an indicator of its street credibility in the eyes of pupils and parents.

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<sup>70</sup> Fishman, J. *Reversing Language Shift*, 1991: 35

Welsh has increasingly become a medium throughout the curriculum and is increasingly being used in formal examination, an important indicator of the currency and market value of Welsh.<sup>71</sup>

This statement by Colin Baker raised the issue of the way Welsh was perceived by parents and pupils. Some of the questions posed in my survey of pupil views will probe their feelings about their sense of identity and the value that they attribute to Gaelic. This was further illustrated in a process of interviewing groups of pupils to consider themes that arose from the questionnaires.

Status of a language is an increasingly important concept and one which is inextricably bound with the issues of identity that I shall be exploring. In the Foreword of C. Baker's *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, Ofelia Garcia suggests that bilingual education has brought with it changed attitudes about the ethnolinguistic identity of children:

The change has resulted, in some cases, in mainstream children for whom bilingualism is becoming a defining feature of their majority culture; in other cases, the evolution is producing children for whom the minority language has become the principal focus of cultural identity.<sup>72</sup>

Although Baker acknowledges it as a generalisation he says that the majority language is likely to be used in the office or factory, with the heritage language used only in non commercial or non academic settings.

In rural areas the language of work and of cultural activities is relatively likely to be the historical language of that area. The language of the farm, or of the fishing boat, of religion and of rustic culture is more likely to be the minority language.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Baker, C. cited in *European Models of Bilingual Education*, Beardsmore, H. B., ed., 1993: 7

<sup>72</sup> García, O., 'Foreword', in Baker, C. *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 1993: vii

Nevertheless Baker concedes that paradoxically the effect of globalisation of the '90's has been, 'To awaken a basic need for rootedness, for an anchor in a local language and local cultural community.'<sup>74</sup> These viewpoints tend to suggest that embracing the mother tongue as well as the dominant language will contribute to a sense of ownership of what is going on in the community and the sense of meaning and purpose which is given by the knowledge of one's identity in context. It has been suggested that the use of language in its natural context is one of the factors which will help in its preservation. The loss of domains of use will result in its dilution. Baetens-Beardsmore (1982) proposed that children who come from a bilingual environment can experience a sense of isolation (*anomie*) that may prevent them from progressing socially or academically. The key to ensuring that young people from a bilingual background achieve a balance in their development is that they have a sense of biculturalism.

Bilinguals who are bicultural, particularly from early childhood onwards, appear to enjoy certain fundamental advantages which can counterbalance the different pulls of allegiance they might be subjected to.<sup>75</sup>

I shall consider more closely what is understood by culture and identity in the following section. These observations on the locus of identity, and the meaning of culture posed by Beardsmore (1982) and Baker (1993) are helpful in that they bring into focus fundamental questions that the young bilingual may well ask and which I consider central to the themes of my research.

In earlier research on language loyalty in Harris, Kenneth MacKinnon had traced the extent of support for Gaelic in everyday use. His findings showed that Gaelic was most used in indigenous occupations such as fishing and crofting, and among older people. Young women were the most likely to give up Gaelic. The language was least supported by those in technical and professional occupations.<sup>76</sup> An important question which follows from this is what the islanders feel about their self identity as Gaelic speakers. MacKinnon also noted from his studies of Barra and Harris that,

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<sup>73</sup> Baker, C. *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 1993: 53

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 52

<sup>75</sup> Baetens-Beardsmore, H. *Bilingualism, basic principles*, 1982, 159

<sup>76</sup> MacKinnon, K. *Power at the Periphery* 1984: 496

The more dominant image of self-identity or social solidarity in these communities was not that of a Gael, Scot or Highlander but that of Islander - or more specifically, Barrach or Hearach.<sup>77</sup>

In this research I have examined the perceptions that pupils studying Gaelic at secondary level in the Western Isles have of these broad assumptions about language acquisition and loss and their perceptions of the aims and the outcomes of Gaelic-medium education. It has to be assumed however that the parents are the first client group before the children, in that they are the ones who have made a choice for Gaelic. I will therefore consider also the context from which parents would have interpreted the new initiative of Gaelic-medium and their views on its status and the role it plays in supporting the preservation of a Gaelic cultural identity.

The Gaelic teens of today, those of a native background, are the children, or perhaps the grandchildren of the first islanders to embrace English as an overall preferred language. The linguistic legacy of these teenagers has for that reason become impoverished and the formal impetus for the provision of Gaelic-medium is driven as much by considerations relating to the survival of a language as it is to the issues relating exclusively to the acquisition of a language.

Gaelic-medium education represented an opportunity for parents to give their children not just fluency in the language but the literacy which they themselves had been denied. Parental motives have not been much researched but it is common for parents who were educated in the islands in the fifties up until the late seventies to have had no Gaelic teaching in the primary sector. In effect, embracing Gaelic Medium was a leap into the unknown for parents, teachers and pupils.

The questions raised by MacKinnon and Baker on language loyalty and identity referencing are important also to young people who have opted to continue with Gaelic as the choice carries with it a self-selecting marginalisation in their English language dominated school communities.



## ***Language, Culture and Identity***

A useful approach to language culture and identity is to consider the way that language ideology has developed through various discourses on the dynamic between these three elements. The way in which language and culture intersect was explored in the research of Sapir (1921) and his suggestion that language background determines the way that individuals interpret the world led to the form of linguistic determinism which was further refined by Whorf. (1956). 'All observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are the same or can be calibrated.' <sup>78</sup>

The important role that locality had in determining identity was explored by Cohen (1982, 2000) but the discourses on national identity are also important. Barth's work *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 1969 on the importance of identity referencing in relation to social and territorial boundaries opens up important questions on groups and how groups are perceived and more importantly how they perceive themselves. It is suggested in the work of MacDonald (1997) that language may not be as strong a marker of identity for young people and that there is a constant and dynamic negotiation and renegotiation of identities. The perspective of Cohen on the interpretation of Scottish identity issues provides a useful template for consideration of matters such as personal identity and peripherality. Cohen accepts that nationalism is now articulated more through cultural symbols and that 'power and symbols are mutually implicated'. <sup>79</sup> He also suggests that, 'the definition or ascription of a group's identity may be the subject and outcome of a *cross* boundary struggle for control'. <sup>80</sup> In other words the group themselves may be unsure of or ambivalent about their identity. The role of the Gaelic language as a symbol of identity, a marker of difference within changing concepts of boundary, and as an aspect of nationalism, is therefore of key interest in this research.

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 496

<sup>78</sup> Whorf, B. Language, Thought and Reality: *Selected Writings of B L Whorf* in Carrol J, (ed), 956:214

<sup>79</sup> Cohen, A. P. *Signifying Identities*, 2000: 160

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*: 1

In his essay on language and nationalism Fishman cites the words of national leaders in support of the view that nationality and language are inextricably and naturally linked.

Ferdinand of Austria (1527) on gaining the crown pledged: ' *nationem et linguam vestrum servare non perdere intendimus.*' Fishman explains the shift of perception that the importance of language brought to the European identity at the time of the rise of modern nationalism, 'What was hitherto often enough viewed as a natural link is now also a cause, a goal and an obligation.'<sup>81</sup> Fishman endorses the views of those who believed that loss of language was shameful. 'To lose your native tongue and to learn that of an alien is the worst badge of conquest,'<sup>82</sup>

Language and identity issues are therefore understood in the context of social trends. After the breakdown of older multilingual empires the desire to seek independence was inextricably linked to language issues. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century western democratic governments favoured a model of society based on cultural pluralism and ideas of cultural conformity, as Trudgill observes, 'The disappearance of languages from the world could speed up the process of cultural homogenisation.'<sup>83</sup> The case for minority language preservation however has its roots in a counter argument, popularised within the romantic movement that preserving cultural identity should be a core value in a society. Eagleton (2000) tracks the development of the idea of culture from its etymological Latin root of *husbandry* suggesting care, to its status as an interchangeable word for civilisation and to its pluralized interpretation as an identifier of 'otherness.' This is also expressed in Sharon MacDonald's analysis:

*Specific language and cultural traditions-including vernacular and folk languages and traditions assumed a new importance for the Romantics... for these were regarded as the source and expression of a people's distinctiveness and inner core.*<sup>84</sup>

The idea that culture is inextricably linked with identity and language emerged from eighteenth century philosophies on the dynamic between nation, state and people.

<sup>81</sup> Fishman, J. *Language and Ethnicity in Minority Sociolinguistic Perspective*, 1989: 279

<sup>82</sup> Davies T. 1945 *Essays and Poems with a centenary memoir:1845*, p 73 Dublin, Gill cited in Fishman, J. *Language and Ethnicity in Minority Sociolinguistic Perspective*, 1989: 279

<sup>83</sup> Trudgill, P. *Sociolinguistics: an Introduction to language and Society*, 2000:193

Macdonald outlined three distinct ideas which underpinned eighteenth century nationalist thinking, namely that:

‘Originality’ and age are sources of contemporary legitimacy and authenticity. Second that contemporary nations states and peoples can be projected into the past i.e. that they are continuing entities. Third, that a distinctive language lies at the heart of a national identity.<sup>85</sup>

The exact nature of the internalising of this perception is discussed by the historian, Malcolm Chapman in his commentary on the early work of anthropologists and social theorists attempting to describe the Hebridean culture in the nineteenth century. In this Chapman suggests that ‘those who are theorised cannot now fail to be aware to some extent of their representation in such theorisation,’ thus reinforcing the notion that to some extent those studying a culture create a heightened awareness among their informants of the separateness of that culture.<sup>86</sup> If this is true is there a sense in which the Gael or the highlander plays out a cultural role which has been ascribed unable to move beyond a stereotype of himself that he has learned? This raises the question also of to what extent the islander has inherited a mindset that he is in a ‘doomed’ scenario, geographically marginalised, linguistically persecuted, almost drowning in the suicide and death metaphors that have been ascribed to the state of his native language.

The opening up of the New World solved some of the problems that had been caused by religious intolerance, but language became the new locus for the marginalisation of minorities. The spread of capitalism brought with it a need to promote state policies more effectively through a common language. Minorities find themselves, ‘struggling against vast assimilatory processes.’<sup>87</sup> In the history of the Gaelic language this struggle was not apparent until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century when Gaelic speakers began to have a political voice, or perhaps it should be said that Scottish nationalist activists in the 1960’s began to identify with the Gaelic language as a national cause.

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<sup>84</sup> MacDonald S. *Reimagining Culture, :histories, identities and the Gaelic renaissance*, 1997: 51

<sup>85</sup> MacDonald S. *Reimagining Culture, :histories, identities and the Gaelic renaissance*, 1997: 38

<sup>86</sup> Chapman, M. *The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture*, 1978: 192

<sup>87</sup> Williams C., in *Linguistic Minorities, Society and Territory*, 1991: 7

Gaelic in Scotland has been in a peculiar situation as it is not connected directly to ideas of nationhood.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, the issues surrounding the educational provision on behalf of Gaelic language preservation have encapsulated in microcosm the broader debates which have, 'focussed variously around the effect that such initiatives will have on the dominant culture, the cost and the pedagogical value.'<sup>89</sup> The salvaging of a language and culture within the education system clearly has a political dimension that is of national interest both for those within and outwith the Gaelic community.

Edwards, (1985) in his overview of the issues pertaining to *language* identity, considers that a given language is 'essential to the maintenance of group identity.'<sup>90</sup> But he argues that language maintenance programmes for minorities in the contexts that he is considering, mainly the USA and Australia are unsuccessful and undesirable.

Education is most unlikely to significantly alter perceptions of self identity or to expedite the progress of cultural pluralism. Specifically it is hoped that educational programmes can support identity through language maintenance. Yet communicative language use is one of those visible manifestations of identity most susceptible to change and decline. Attempting to prop it up in the school therefore runs counter to social trends.<sup>91</sup>

Fishman also argued that society had raised expectations of schools as a substitute locus of enculturation of youth when other traditional institutions were on the wane: the family, the church, the youth movement, the armed forces.<sup>92</sup> His eight stage paradigm for reversing language shift proposes an ideal but in my view it is not fully concordant with the situation vis a vis Gaelic survival in that the community outwith schools may have drifted too far in language loss to be the alternative locus of reinforcement in the sense proposed by Fishman. His solution is dependent upon a societal infrastructure capable of promoting language reinforcement and enculturation and it is questionable whether that is a real

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<sup>88</sup> Nicolson M and MacIver M Contexts and Futures , Gaelic Medium education, *Policy and Practice in Education* vol 10, : 65

<sup>89</sup> Epstein , N. *Bilingual and Bicultural education: the role of the scholar*. In Georgetown University Round Table on Linguistics, J Alatis (ed) 1978(a) cited in Edwards, J . 1985: 125

<sup>90</sup> Edwards J. *Language, Society and Identity*, 1985:3

<sup>91</sup> Ibid:137

<sup>92</sup> Fishman J. *Reversing Language Shift*, 1991: 371

possibility for the Western Isles given the extent of Gaelic language dilution. Fishman suggests that viable support communities are of greater benefit than the school:

Without considerable and repeated societal reinforcement schools cannot successfully teach either first or second languages, and furthermore, where such reinforcement is plentifully available, languages are acquired and retained even if they are not taught in school.<sup>93</sup>

This appears to be the reverse of an apparent norm in the islands where statistics show that Gaelic language loss was so great that schools had to become agents of language preservation. My research has aimed to ascertain from a sampling of participant parents and educationalists their views of the role being played by schools in Gaelic revival and the additional support that may be required to support the Gaelic medium initiative. In my research I was also interested in the issues raised by Fishman, Edwards and other academics on the questions of ethnic identity as it relates to language minorities. Edwards (1985) posed a fundamental question, which is also of crucial interest to the Gaelic-medium issue 'What is the function of the school in the maintenance of group identity and of group language?'<sup>94</sup>

This question raises the notion of the value and priority given locally and nationally to language preservation. I expect to examine this in the light of my informants' views of the status of Gaelic and its effect on their sense of identity. In tracing the background to ethnic identity politics there is no doubt that the emergence of language movements was perceived at one time as a threat to existing orders. Fishman described the 'contrastive self identification' which the use of a language allows groups to assert their uniqueness.<sup>95</sup> But governments can also see the political value of accepting language difference. Trudgill identifies the two polar opposite attitudinal positions on this matter. On the one hand, 'language can signal a separate group consciousness and solidarity.'<sup>96</sup> Yet governments accept that the teaching of minority languages is of benefit to minority group children

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid

<sup>94</sup> Edwards, J. *Language Society and Identity*, 1985: 118

<sup>95</sup> Fishman, J. *Language and Ethnicity in Minority Sociolinguistic Perspective*, 1989: 286

<sup>96</sup> Trudgill, P. *Sociolinguistics: an Introduction to language and Society*, 2000: 127

because, 'it has the effect of recognising the child's social and cultural identity and integrity and encourages the growth of minority cultures.' <sup>97</sup>

The issue of ethnic identity rivalling a national or state identity has tended to colour the political response to minority language rights. The 'linguistic dislocation' that minorities experienced was often just one facet of a 'wider process of social, cultural and political displacement.' <sup>98</sup> Over the centuries the motives of language movements based on ethnicity have been held in suspicion. Edwards points out that 'Fichte, Herder and others made it abundantly clear that language was to be conceived as an almost sacred concomitant of nationality.'<sup>99</sup> Fishman in suggesting that language becomes, 'a prime ethnic value in itself,' elevates language to the major marker of identity. <sup>100</sup> The new social order emphasising rights and freedoms proposes that the state should provide an environment where, 'a minority culture may be permitted to operate in formal public domains.' <sup>101</sup>

Within the current culture and identity debates is the notion too that the concept of nationhood itself is changing. There is an emerging tolerance and accommodation to diversity of culture which sociolinguist Ben Rampton believed could be demonstrated by the facility with which young people could 'switch codes' jumping from the idiom of one language to another thereby to some extent overcoming race stereotypes and boundaries. Rampton (1995) in his research of sociolinguistic processes in multicultural youth culture suggests that assimilatory processes are not necessarily a bad thing:

As the boundaries around national belonging become more permeable, there is scope for assimilation, and there is no longer such an obvious contradiction of the fundamental liberal view that people should be judged by their conduct rather than by their birth. <sup>102</sup>

As discussed earlier in this chapter, there is an implicit understanding that dying languages somehow represent a loss of culture. To understand the question of what is culture one

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<sup>97</sup> Trudgill, P. *Sociolinguistics: an Introduction to language and Society*, 2000: 126

<sup>98</sup> May, S. *Journal of Multicultural and Multilingual Development*, 2005, vol. 21. No 5: 368

<sup>99</sup> Edwards J. *Language Society and Identity*, 1985: 161

<sup>100</sup> Fishman J. *Language and Ethnicity in Minority Sociolinguistic Perspective*, 1989: 32

<sup>101</sup> Williams, C., in *Linguistic Minorities, Societies and Territory*, 1991:10

<sup>102</sup> Rampton B. *Crossing: language and identity among adolescents*: 1995:8

may have to move from the rather bland definition of culture theorist, Raymond Williams that culture is 'ordinary' and is just 'common meanings and directions' that shape a society.<sup>103</sup> That analysis does not seem to encapsulate the fervour with which cultural diversities are played out in sporting arenas, and even in language debates. One might however identify more with Strinati's analysis that in today's culture there is a tendency for people to feel a lack of cohesion resulting in a society of 'atomised people who lack any meaningful or morally coherent relationships with each other'<sup>104</sup>

The notion that it is culturally desirable to speak a language carries with it the suggestion that the language in question is a viable medium for normal interaction. Fishman argues that a language is indexically related to its culture and symbolically related.<sup>105</sup> In other words the language and culture grow hand in hand and the language stands for the culture. Almost all the languages of the world have also come to stand for the particular ethnic collectivities that speak them. But as Fishman says majority languages are perceived by minorities as 'a language of greater advantage in status, income, social acceptance and social participation.'<sup>106</sup>

Pierre Bourdieu in his major study. *La Distinction* opened a discourse suggesting that aesthetic taste is socially engineered and that social class determines our cultural tastes. Bourdieu's concept of '*habitus*' suggests that 'taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier.'<sup>107</sup> The dominant in society will therefore determine the tastes of the masses be it in language, text, way of living. In this way identities can be significantly altered by consumer trends. Minorities of endangered languages can be particularly vulnerable as small enclosed groups who have their horizons opened up can find their culture both diluted and exploited by consumer culture.<sup>108</sup>

The discourses on the emergence of postmodernism highlight the interplay between culture and identity and the potential threat that market forces can pose to small

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<sup>103</sup> Williams, R., in *Studying Culture :an Introductory Reader*, Gray A, and McGuigan J (eds) 1997: 5-14

<sup>104</sup> Strinati, D. *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*, 1995: 6

<sup>105</sup> Fishman J, *Reversing language Shift*, 1991: 20

<sup>106</sup> Ibid : 23

<sup>107</sup> Bourdieu, P, *Distinctions and the Aristocracy of Culture* in Storey, J. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (ed) 1994:437

<sup>108</sup> Wright S, *Language Policy and Language Planning*, 2004:227

communities. In a postmodernist consumer led society there is a significant struggle to maintain an identity. Traditional sources of identity are described as decentred, or eroded.

Economic globalisation', ( the tendency for the making, financing and selling of goods and services to take place without regard to, and above and beyond the realities of the nation state and local communities), is seen as an important reason for the gradual erosion of these traditional identities.<sup>109</sup>

To examine the ways in which Gaels define themselves and their culture it is important to have an overview of where Gaelic stands in the minds of people and how they view or participate in their culture at a local, regional and national level. The work of support bodies, plus the inception of the Gaelic board have brought a sense of revival to the language but that revival is based on a heightened awareness of the fragility of the language. There is a sense also that Gaels must articulate their need in a broader arena of cultural and economic development to ensure the survival of their language, especially as one role of the board is to support Gaelic by providing funding for projects. This falls short of providing political power and it is an irony that although a Gaelic Board has been set up the post of Minister for Gaelic has been dropped. Gaelic matters were for a time an arm of the tourism portfolio.

In his critique in boundary maintenance in *Reversing Language Shift*, (1991) Fishman imagines the minority language group fighting a rearguard action against the co-territorial dominant language group. He suggests that with greater autonomy and self management the small language group will succeed in ring fencing the language domain in order to preserve their cultural and linguistic purity. In an earlier work he had also suggested that 'ethnic identity logically requires not only boundaries (contrast) but opposition across boundaries for such identity to be fully articulated.'<sup>110</sup> Although Fishman has argued that experiments with language revival have had this desired effect of creating revitalised language enclaves, notably the movement to salvage the Hebrew language during the 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Strinati D. Postmodernism and Popular Culture in Storey, J. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (ed) 1994:437

<sup>110</sup> Fishman J. *Language and Ethnicity in Minority Sociolinguistic Perspective*, 1989: 33



century,<sup>111</sup> there is a sense in which this type of movement carries with it a certain fervour that can alienate others and increasingly in the 'global village' environment that modern technology has created, such boundaries are not easy to maintain. Other language revival attempts noted by Fishman had varying degrees of success at least in terms of stabilising absolute numbers of speakers as with Frisian, or in bringing changes in the law to address the needs of the threatened language group as happened with French in Quebec, in the 1970's or in persuading the government to grant parity in education as happened with Catalan in Spain in the 1980's.<sup>112</sup>

Bernard Spolsky, (2004) in commenting on Fishman's research suggested that successful efforts to reverse language shift depended upon the political power of the minority groups. The 'internal mobilisation' which Fishman considers so crucial must also depend on the willingness of governments to be persuaded to 'recognise and provide support for their activities.'<sup>113</sup> He also questions whether Fishman is right in perceiving language management issues as essentially adversarial and asks whether the issue for language management policy should always be seen as a David and Goliath situation, a struggle of the weak against the strong. Others such as David Crystal have argued that social and economic factors have an equal role to play. Crystal challenged the notion that the eight stages nominated by Fishman for preventing language death were actually stages and listed instead six '*postulates for a theory of revitalisation*'.<sup>114</sup> These were; increased prestige in the dominant community for speakers of the language, an increase in wealth relative to the dominant community, increased legitimate power, a strong presence in the educational system, a writing system and access to electronic technology. Of these Spolsky asserts only one, 'a writing system,' is normally considered a language maintenance activity.<sup>115</sup>

This debate has provided me with a starting point to consider the recurring questions which spurred my interest in the Gaelic language preservation issues that affect schools and society. Fishman himself asked the question 'how threatened is threatened?'<sup>116</sup> Within

<sup>111</sup> Fishman J. *Reversing language Shift*, 1991: 289-291

<sup>112</sup> A full account of these minorities discussed in Fishman J, *Reversing Language Shift: 1991*

<sup>113</sup> Spolsky, B. *Language Planning*, 2004: 188

<sup>114</sup> Crystal D. *Language death*, 2000: 130

<sup>115</sup> Spolsky, B. *Language Planning*, 2004: 216

<sup>116</sup> Fishman J. *Reversing Language Shift*, 1991: chapter 4

this question lies much of what has motivated the efforts on behalf of Gaelic in schools. It has to be remembered that behind every educational initiative there is a philosophy or an ideology which reflects in some way the will of the people. In endorsing this view Fishman, asserts that:

Like all sociolinguistic behaviour of whatever kind, bilingual education functions within a social context which includes schoolwide, communitywide, regionwide, nationwide and even international dimensions.<sup>117</sup>

He sees bilingual education as creating, 'communal regional and international realities,'<sup>118</sup> as it serves community needs and pursues societal goals. In his resumé of minority language issues in the United States, Fishman acknowledges that,

Since most bilingual education in the United States is relatively new it suffers from lack of community consensus, lack of trained teachers, lack of perfected curricula, lack of clear goals, lack of validated language models, and above all lack of information.<sup>119</sup>

This is a state of affairs which many parents and teachers would have identified as typifying the early days of bilingualism in the Western Isles.

In his paper to the Conference on Minority Languages in Bilbao in 1999 Wilson McLeod identifies the same lack of policy and planning in relation to the Gaelic situation:

Relatively little consideration has been given to matters of language development in a more formal sense, to language planning or to language policy.<sup>120</sup>

Pupils have had to adapt to what McLeod called 'The Renaissance without Planning,' and to make what they can out of a Gaelic-medium system which stopped short of creating

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<sup>117</sup> Fishman, J. *Bilingual Education – An International and Sociological Perspective*, 1976: xi

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, xi

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 18

<sup>120</sup> McLeod, W. *Gaelic in Scotland: A Renaissance Without Planning*, 1999: 1

language continuity by providing teaching in discrete subjects in Gaelic across the secondary curriculum.

It was clear at the inception of bilingual education that there had been considerable erosion of the family and the community as the main arenas for the acquisition of Gaelic. School was identified as a place where the trend of language loss could be reversed with the aim of maintaining the status of diglossic bilingualism. A key question to be addressed in this research is whether or not the erosion of Gaelic culture has a detrimental effect on the confidence that parents have in Gaelic education.

In other minority language cultures and in some countries a more aggressive approach to language preservation has been adopted. In his 1994 research review Richard Johnstone traces four case histories relating to attempts to preserve minority languages.<sup>121</sup> Johnstone considered the case histories he referred to as having salutary lessons for the future planning of Gaelic development. In the countries where strategies beyond education were employed as national initiatives by governments there was greater credence given to the promotion of the minority language. Such broad strategies have notably been missing from the promotion of Gaelic to date but Johnstone asks to what extent there is evidence of the following:

Cultural self-definition and self-projection plus positive expectations in relation to Gaelic language and culture.

Establishment of the language across a range of domains (e.g. in the home, education, broadcasting)... so as to promote variety within the language and culture and maintain its vitality.

Public support for Gaelic in the form of policy directives or guidelines.<sup>122</sup>

These suggestions prefigure the positional stance of Crystal (2000) on some of the essentials for the robust pursuit of language maintenance and bring into play the notion that

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<sup>121</sup> Johnstone, R. *The Impact of Current Developments to Support the Gaelic Language*, 1994: 23-28

<sup>122</sup> Ibid: 30

the society must view itself confidently and have a clear view of what it wishes to preserve in its culture.

Schools have to provide a viable learning environment for children of disparate backgrounds and for this reason the possible divisiveness of having two distinct cultural boundaries opens an interesting area of investigation into the Gaelic-medium debate.

In *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Barth suggests that people within the group create and maintain the boundaries. 'Ethnic groups are categories of description and identification by the actors themselves'.<sup>123</sup> This has implications for the way in which communities promote Gaelic and the way in which the school as a community addresses the possible problems created by having two potentially dissonant cultures within its boundaries. Increasingly there is a perception that ethnic identity ascribes a status, either high or low on the members. Language minority groups while in one sense being part of a species threatened with extinction can become new elites bonded by a language status which crosses cultural boundaries and effectively ring fences them into an ethnic scenario where membership is dependent on language acquisition. It is this uniqueness which can make elites agents of change in challenging or altering the status of the majority. It can equally make them marginalised as a scapegoat group or at make them, as Beardsmore suggested subject to personality problems and compromised intellectually.<sup>124</sup>

The fact that Gaelic speakers are identified in some circles as an elite can be related to perceptions about identity and ethnicity. There is a feeling that Gaelic speaking pupils are better resourced in education because of the budgets from specific grants. From my own teaching experience I am aware of the enhanced arrangements for pupils wishing to be interviewed for GM teaching. For example they are interviewed locally rather than having to undergo a more rigorous interview process on the mainland. Research in the field of the development issues relating to language preservation has revealed a process of identity politics by which individuals and groups in Western societies now negotiate for economic resources, political power, and cultural and social legitimacy by laying claim to a myriad of social identities.

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<sup>123</sup> Barth, F. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 1967: 10

<sup>124</sup> Baetens- Beardsmore, H. *Bilingualism: Basic Principles*, 1986: 153

There is no straightforward criterion that makes political struggle into an example of “identity politics;” rather, the term signifies a loose collection of political projects that each articulate a collective with a distinctively different social location that has hitherto been neglected erased or suppressed.<sup>125</sup>

There is therefore around the Gaelic language preservation issue the potential for debate about how national resources are distributed. Joshua Fishman has outlined the way in which having an extra language is now perceived as being an additional asset in life for people of marked, i.e. minority language cultures.

There are already beginnings of bilingual education at public expense for unmarked children, and it is in this very context that the adherents of enrichment bilingual education see the major contribution that their philosophy can make.<sup>126</sup>

Although arguing that promoting minority languages seeks to promote both vernacularisation and internationalism he points out that sceptics resent the diverting of resources claiming that

The expenses involved are considered disproportionately great for the benefits derived. The entire philosophical premise of enrichment bilingual education is simply disbelieved and reacted to as dealing with esoterica and exotica.<sup>127</sup>

Some development initiatives have tended to focus their efforts on promoting pseudo Gaelic events in Gaelic speaking regions giving rise to a new concept of Gaelic culture which has no connection with language preservation. It is notable that of the *fèisean* that take place in the Western Isles only one is conducted entirely in the medium of Gaelic. The *Ceòlas* summer school held annually in South Uist is primarily a cultural event with the emphasis on music rather than on language preservation. The influx of visitors from Cape

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<sup>125</sup> Heyes, Cressida. *Identity Politics in The Stanford Encyclopedia*, Zalta N., ed. 2003: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-politics>

<sup>126</sup> Fishman, J. *Language and Ethnicity in Minority Sociolinguistic Perspective*, 1988: 448

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 449

Breton to this festival, some of whom have Gaelic, has highlighted rather poignantly the fragility of the language. It is as if by embracing the former exiles for a week in the summer we can somehow salvage our dying language.

As I suggested earlier in the discussion, because social scientists are not in agreement about what constitutes identity and its relation to language it is a complex issue. Claims to identity and ascriptions to identity are conveyed not just through language but through many other signs. Language could be said however to be the prime representative of identity in areas where there are more than one language. Even within the islands there is a struggle for primacy in relation to borders and linguistic variations within boundaries. The questions about heritage and identity that I will pose will demonstrate whether the pupils' vision of language loyalty is as Gaels, Scots or whether or not they see themselves more closely linked to local boundaries such as 'Uibhisteachs' or as 'Hearachs'. This raises another important issue of whether or not our global culture is making children less bound to their local identity and more aware of their national allegiances.

A recent doctoral thesis by Kara Smith in which she looked at the experiences of isolated Gaelic language users claimed that teenagers in her study have moved away from their parents' views on Gaelic and regard Gaelic as being exotic and prized.

This demonstrates an important change in attitude towards Gaelic between these two generations. Yesterday the adults felt it was thought of as old fashioned and 'teuchter.' Today teenagers feel and perceive it as elite.<sup>128</sup>

In the evidence from a recent Lèirsinn study:

The extent of Gaelic spoken in the school as a whole was much less than in the Gaelic classrooms. Out and about in community was where use of Gaelic was least extensive.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Smith, K. *Gaelic Language Maintenance Processes*, 2001: 93

<sup>129</sup> MacNeil, M and Stradling, B. *Emergent Identities and Bilingual Education*, 1999: ii

In my research I was able to hear the views of pupils on these issues and it was interesting to see that they valued their Gaelic culture but at the same time did not overtly wave banners on its behalf. They could see Gaelic as being their own culture and as an enhancement in terms of giving them a stronger identity. This is in keeping with what has already been established in other research, such as the work conducted in Sutherland by Nancy Dorian which has illustrated the return of third generation language users to the tongue of their grandparents after periods of language shift by the second generation.

The ancestral language connects a people to its language in ways that there is simply no substitute for. Awareness of this is what inspires so many third generation grandchildren of immigrants to learn a language their grandparents deliberately abandoned.<sup>130</sup>

In the framework of this research one of my aims was to re examine the current perceptions of the value that is ascribed to Gaelic as a marker of identity by pupils, parents and educationalists, to pursue the notions of identity that young people have and to question whether or not Gaelic is a part of it.

## ***Chapter 2 Summary***

In this chapter I have provided an overview of the range of areas embraced by my research interest. Firstly I have considered the role of parents in relating to the unfolding educational opportunities afforded by Gaelic immersion. I have then looked at Gaelic and how perceptions of its status tended to affect the notion of identity. Lastly I have considered some of the fundamental questions of language, culture, identity that have been of pivotal interest in the field of language preservation and these shall be examined in later chapters from the perspective of pupils, parents and educationalists through the analysis and presentation questionnaire data and from what has come to light in the interview process.

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<sup>130</sup> Dorian, N. *Linguistic and Ethnographic Fieldwork*, cited in Fishman J, 1999: 39

## Chapter 3 – Methodology of Research

As my interest in the subject of Gaelic-medium developed I was struck by the fact that among all the talk of immersion and language salvation, young people in the Western Isles had not themselves been consulted about the experience as beneficiaries of the process. And yet they had undergone a unique experience in having been withdrawn from the mainstream and placed in an immersion environment. This in itself leads to an interesting field of inquiry about how this Gaelic cohort relate to the other cohorts in school. I was interested to discover if the change in cultural environment from primary to secondary had an effect on pupils in terms of their happiness and motivation. Does being in Gaelic-medium actually encourage them to use Gaelic more as an everyday language? Some of the important questions I wanted to address related to the broader aims of this process. These were the culture questions and the questions I thought that young people would eventually ask of themselves. Will a strong Gaelic background and education affect pupils' sense of worth in their community; make them identify more strongly with an island culture? Will they want to retain a Gaelic identity, whatever that might be when they leave the island? Will other factors such as peer pressure or a stronger devolved Scotland eclipse the role that Gaelic may have in defining their identity? These issues are impossible to quantify but my study aims to present the experience of Gaelic-medium and its related issues as described by a sampling of pupils who were the first generation, (*A chiad ghinealach*) to undertake this form of education in the Western Isles.

The research data was collected in the Western Isles from pupils, teachers, educationalists and parents between November 2001 and January 2003. There were four stages of data collection.

### Stage One: Pupil Questionnaire Survey

The first stage was a pupil questionnaire, the results of which are presented and analysed in Chapter 5 of this research.

Key features of my research were the contexts in which Gaelic-medium education was being experienced, and the way that this experience may inform a sense of identity and an



awareness of culture. As I was approaching the research from situational theories of identity I was therefore anxious that these dimensions would be explicit in the surveys I conducted. This suggested to me that in terms of the area of pupil research my investigation should operate on two levels of research inquiry. Firstly, my pupil respondents would complete a questionnaire which would embrace the whole experience of Gaelic medium from the start of primary one. The follow up interviews would provide a second layer of information which would enhance the research. Topics to be included in the pupil questionnaire were initially discussed informally with a group of pupils in Shawbost Secondary School in Lewis and then piloted in Hillpark Secondary in Glasgow among a sample of 20 pupils. This enabled me to ascertain the effectiveness of the survey in terms of pupil understanding of the questions set. I decided to arrange the questions in sections tracing the involvement of pupils in GME from their primary school experience to secondary focusing on the transition and progression through a secondary school environment, what they have gained from their Gaelic education. The final section of the questionnaire dealt with questions relating to their use of and perceptions about Gaelic in the wider community. I adopted the approach of seeking simple factual information at the start and the questionnaire was designed to allow the participants to reflect chronologically on the experience. I expected that this methodology of recollection of the experience would provide a process of reflection that would allow their thoughts to develop from simple fact based recollections to questions with a broader focus designed to allow them to offer views and reflect on their Gaelic experience, the contexts of its use, its cultural advantages, if any and their sense of identity. In this way the pupil questionnaire was a preparation for the subsequent interview process which would cover the same themes.

The questionnaire was then circulated to the four six-year secondary schools in the region: the Nicolson Institute, Sir E. Scott School, Sgoil Lionacleit, and Castlebay Community School, situated respectively in Lewis, Harris, Uist and Barra. Prior agreement to participation in the project had been given by the directorate of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Education and Leisure Services). Consent was given also by the head teachers of the schools and the Gaelic department heads. The questionnaire was circulated to pupils through the Gaelic departments and this enabled the returns to be made fairly rapidly to me. In agreeing to take part in the survey the schools also accepted that they would participate in follow-up interviews. I realised that due to the rolling programme of school

internal assessment, (which is different in each school) and the academic and other commitments of years five and six that I would have a more realistic chance of interviewing children from years two, three and four. In general pupils in the final two years of school, studying Gaelic are involved in prelim exams, the university application process, possibly the national Gaelic debate, work experience and so on. My own opportunities for conducting interviews were also restricted by my own work commitments. Despite the constraints of time and distance and other factors I felt that the participating schools accommodated to my requests with enthusiasm, briefed the children before my arrival and provided a private space in each school where the interview sessions could be conducted.

The chosen methodology of the interviews was small group. I had considered one to one situation but from my years of experience as a principal teacher of guidance I felt that the group approach would be more rewarding in terms of getting a flow of conversation and ideas, in a short space of time. I also thought that in terms of eliminating possible bias, it was in my favour that I was not a representative of a Gaelic teaching department, or from a Gaelic body. Therefore the key focus of my interest was not their academic achievement in Gaelic, but more their impressions of the educational experience and beyond the experience to their perceptions of themselves as persons from a Gaelic background and I mentioned this to all of the groups taking part. In the case of pupils from my own school I asked to interview pupils who were not known to me in a teaching context in either of my on disciplines of teaching English or from Guidance role.

A further measure to eliminate the potential bias that attends all interview scenarios was that the substantive content of the interview questions dealt with material that was already familiar to the participants from the previously issued questionnaire. In the interviews I attempted to achieve an open ended approach by asking the respondents to elaborate on some of the themes that had emerged from the questionnaire survey. This enabled some of my respondents to give a clearer picture of their experiences and views by relating an anecdote or memory from their experience or by giving a clearer account of a viewpoint.

Kitwood (1997) noted that in an interpersonal encounter people are more likely to disclose aspects of themselves, their thoughts, their feelings and values, than they would in a less

human situation.<sup>131</sup> The interviewer has to achieve a balance between having a friendly transaction and being too detached, rational and calculating. Watts and Ebutt, (1987) have examined the efficacy of the group interview process in educational research and have concluded that such interviews are useful where the group have shared experiences or have worked at a 'common purpose.'<sup>132</sup> In my view the shared experiences of having had a Gaelic immersion education, and having taken part in my questionnaire corresponded to this notion of shared experience.

In tape recording the interviews I was aware of the suggested guidelines of (Hycner 1985) particularly in noting both the literal and paralinguistic communication. Another important guideline followed was listening to the interview for a sense of the whole, by listening to the transcriptions several times and reading the transcriptions, 'to provide a context for the emergence of specific units of meaning and themes later on.'<sup>133</sup>

The approximate number of pupil questionnaires distributed to the schools was as follows: 50 to the Nicolson Institute; 20 to Sir E. Scott School; 50 to Sgoil Lionacleit; and 10 to Castlebay Community School. However, these are not necessarily the total number of questionnaires actually distributed to pupils. This is because a larger number of questionnaires than needed was sent to each school, and the Principal Teacher of Gaelic in each school agreed to be responsible for selecting the survey sample from among the fluent speakers' Gaelic classes (Gàidhlig) within their own school.

The selection of pupils was discussed with the Principal Teachers of Gaelic in advance, and teachers were given autonomy in selecting the sample but were operating from within the constraints mentioned. The teachers therefore tended to select pupils from third and fourth years although the Lewis school allowed two senior pupils to take part that had the time available and had expressed an interest in the process. The reason for not choosing first and second year pupils was that many of them were not considered to be old enough to participate in the study and would be less able to reflect critically on their experiences.

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<sup>131</sup> Kitwood, T M, cited in Cohen, L and Manion L, *Research Methods in Education*, 1994:282

<sup>132</sup> Watts, M. and Ebutt D, 'More than the Sum of the Parts; research methods in group interviewing.' *British Educational Research Journal*, 1987, 13 (1) 25-34

<sup>133</sup> Hycner, R. H., 'Some guidelines for the phenomenological analysis of interview data', *Human Studies*, 1985, 8, 279-303.

However, in Castlebay Community School, first- and second-year pupils were interviewed because the school did not have any Gàidhlig-stream pupils beyond second year.

The total numbers of secondary pupils in the Gàidhlig stream in 2002-2003, when the pupil interviews were conducted, were provided by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. They are shown in the following table:

### **Gaelic Medium pupils in Western Isles 2002-2003**

School	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	TOTAL
L	24	23	47	37	18	7	156
H	6	10	6	11	3	1	36
U	18	17	30	33	22	7	127
B	5	7	8	6	2	3	31

### **Statistics of Pupil Questionnaire**

A total of 88 completed questionnaires were returned from the four schools, from 54 females and 34 males. The breakdown by school and stage is shown in the table below.

School	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	TOTAL
L	-	-	16 (11f, 5m)	15 (6f, 9m)	-	2 (2f)	33 (19f, 14m)
H	-	-	6 (3f, 3m)	-	-	-	6 (3f, 3m)
U	-	-	35 (23f, 12m)	8 (3f, 5m)	-	-	43 (17m)
B	3 (3f)	3 (2f, 1m)	-	-	-	-	6 (5f, 1m)

To facilitate the responses to the questionnaire, questions were grouped into the following sign-posted sections: 'Language Background' (Q1), 'Primary School and Home' (questions 2-8), 'Transition to Secondary' (questions 9-11), 'Progress in Secondary School' (questions 12-21), and 'Gaelic in the Wider Community' (questions 21-27).

These sections embraced questions relating to the following themes: Primary Experience; Secondary Transition; Gaelic Medium in Other Subjects; Awareness of Opportunities; Awareness of Culture and Identity Issues; The Effect of TV and Radio Programmes on Young People; Awareness of the Current Position of Gaelic; and Negative Aspects.

The data for this stage is analysed in Chapter 3.

## **Stage Two: Interviews with Pupils**

Stage two of the data collection consisted of an interview process which provided the basis for Chapter 7 of this research. This took place after the data in Chapter 4 had been collated and analysed. In this way I was able to use the interview process to focus on points of interest which had emerged from stage one.

The pupils interviewed were selected by the Gaelic department head at each school, from among those who had originally taken part in the questionnaire survey. The total numbers of pupils interviewed at each school were as follows: nine pupils from the Nicolson Institute in Lewis (interviewed in two separate groups of six and three respectively); three pupils from Sir E. Scott School in Harris; four pupils from Sgoil Lionacleit in Uist; and six pupils from Castlebay Community School in Barra.

To avoid making the interview another verbal questionnaire I adopted a strategy of asking pupils to recollect their GM experience from their earliest memories of primary. Pupils

were reminded of the Questionnaire they had already completed and the possible themes of discussion contained in it. This approach had the advantage of allowing the general themes that I was aware of from the Stage One data to be discussed in more detail and for other issues and concerns to emerge in a natural way as part of a general conversation. I had considered conducting this part of the research in Gaelic but I felt that using the medium of English would reassure the pupils that I was not connected to the Gaelic departments in any way and that the interviews were not an assessment of their ability in Gaelic. The interviews were tape recorded with the students' permission. Their taped responses were transcribed and categorised by me into their constituent themes. The results are presented in Chapter 5.

### **Stage Three: Interviews with Parents**

Stage Three of the data collection consisted of a questionnaire survey of parent views on Gaelic-medium education. The choice of postal questionnaire as a method of collecting the research data was dictated by both time and cost factors. I aimed for clarity of wording and simplicity of design and was careful to limit the number of questions to parents as I felt that this would elicit a more positive response both in terms of the likelihood of the form being returned and in the quality of the responses. According to the research of Honville and Jewell, (1978) postal questionnaires have as much chance of eliciting information as interview methods. I included a covering letter, tailored to the audience, explaining my interest in the subject, in the hope that parents would view my request more positively. Themes covered in the questionnaire included: parents' reasons for choosing Gaelic-medium; perceived benefits and disadvantages of it; opinions about the support required for parents; opinions about the necessity for secondary education through Gaelic, and the role of the Gaelic media in Gaelic-medium education (for the full questionnaire, see Appendix C.) The questionnaire was more difficult to conduct as parents were not available as a captive audience. Pupils were given one questionnaire each to take home to their parents and a stamped envelope was provided to enable them to reply to me directly. The goal was to separate data collection from Gaelic curricular matters in the mind of parents. I was pleased that just over 30 per cent of households, 27 in total, responded to the questionnaire sent home with their children. Questionnaire letters were colour coded so that I could see clearly which districts in my survey were providing responses. The data

from their responses is displayed in the graphs and analysis in Chapter 6 and the summarised and collated responses of parents, grouped by school can be seen in Appendix D.

#### **Stage Four: Survey of Educationalists**

The fourth and final phase of data collection was a questionnaire survey of Head Teachers and Gaelic teachers from each of the four participating schools, and educationalists involved in Gaelic at advisory or directorate level in the Western Isles region. A total of three Head Teachers, three Principal Teachers of Gaelic, one Gaelic teacher, and five educationalists returned the questionnaire to me. The questions asked related to the following themes: the effectiveness of Gaelic-medium; the study of discrete subjects through the medium of Gaelic; the issue of Gaelic ethos within schools; the role of parents; and the status and promotion of Gaelic on a national and regional basis. Following on the results of Stages one and two, I particularly wished to explore issues such as the status of Gaelic, the place of Gaelic in the school ethos, and culture and identity issues affecting pupils. Chapter 7 reviews and analyses the survey responses. Appendix E shows the schedule of interview questions for this group.

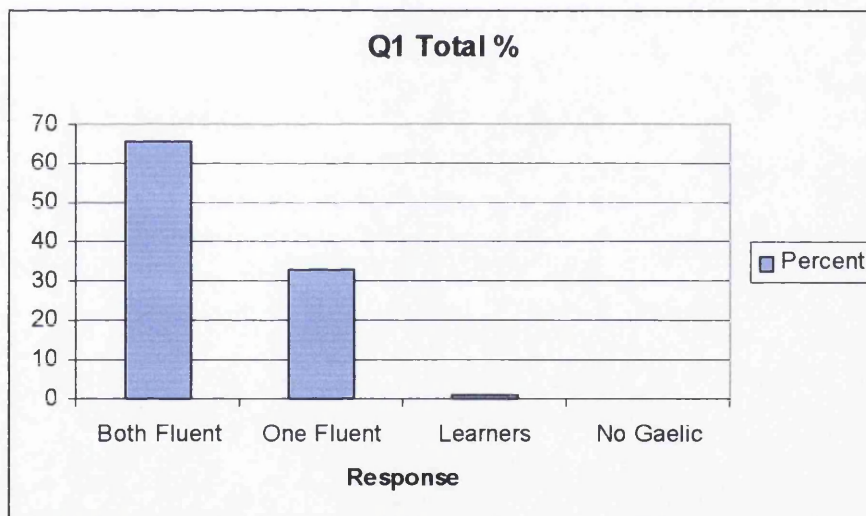
## Chapter 4 – Pupil Questionnaire Details

In this chapter I have presented the findings of the pupil questionnaire in a series of graphs. The full questionnaire can be reviewed in Appendix A, and the tabulated questionnaire responses are presented in Appendix B.

### Question 1

Which of the following best describes your home experience of Gaelic?

- a Two parents / guardians who are fluent in Gaelic
- b One parent who is fluent
- c Parents / guardians who are learners
- d Parents / guardians who have no Gaelic



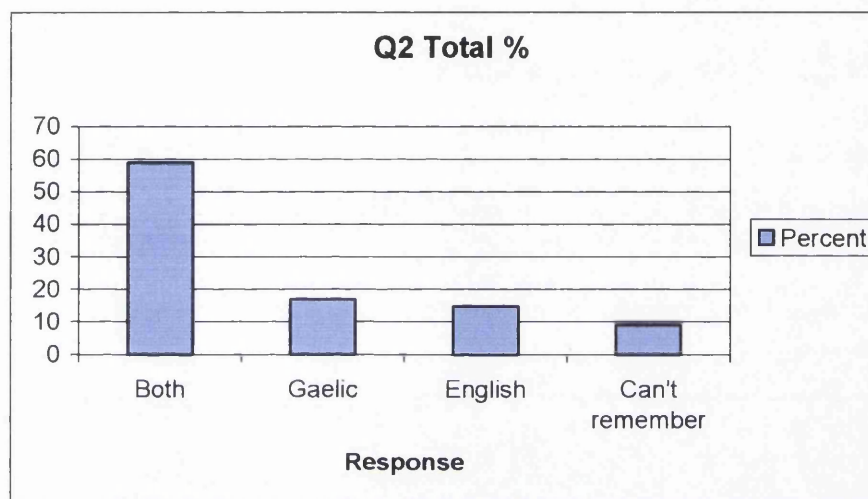
The distribution for this question showed that all pupils but one came from a home background of fluency (either one or both parents). One pupil had a parent who was a learner.



## Question 2

When you started primary school were you able to speak in

- a Gaelic and English
- b Gaelic Only
- c English only
- d Can't remember

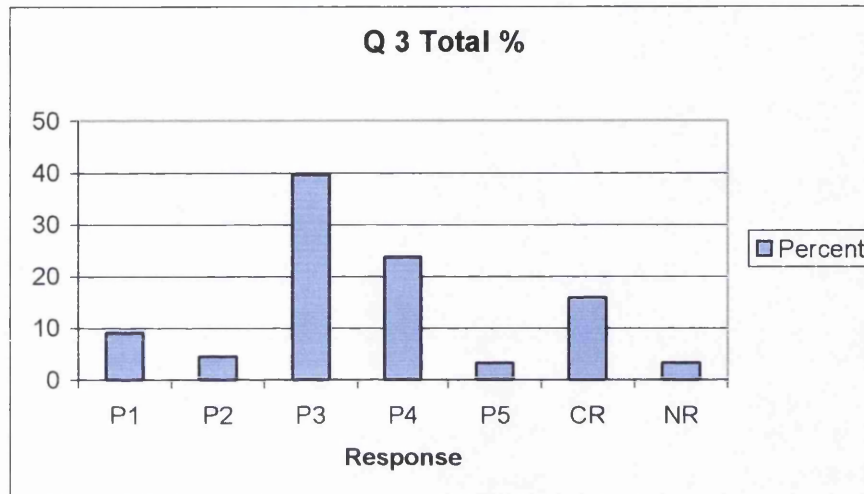


The graph indicates that many were already speaking both languages at the start of their primary school education. The numbers indicating that they spoke English only are almost as high as the Gaelic only group. However the results for Options 'a', 59% and 'b', 17%, taken together indicate that a good proportion, 76% would have had a background of Gaelic before starting school.

### Question 3

In which year of primary school was teaching in English introduced?

P1 P2 P3 P4 P5 P6 P7 Can't remember



The graphs indicate that most respondents recalled that English was introduced in the main in P3. It may be surprising that pupils remember Gaelic being introduced as late as primary four but this may be that memories are blurred by the fact that in many schools classes were composite. It is notable therefore that 64% of the sample thought that they remembered English being introduced in primaries 3 and 4.

Less than 10% overall indicated that they remembered English being introduced as early as P1 and all of these were from Uist and Barra schools. A reason for this could be that some schools in these areas were later in introducing Gaelic medium and there may have been a higher proportion of pupils who were not fluent in Gaelic before going to school. Eleven pupils from Uist were unsure about the year of introduction of English. The prevalence of composite classes in the Uists could be the reason for this high result. Often children from

several year groups would be in the same composite class. It was therefore difficult for pupils who had been educated in this system to remember exactly what had taken place in any given year.

What is striking is that over 80% of the sample have a clear memory of when English was introduced, and it seems likely that they have fairly accurate recall of this, as it would have been an important milestone in terms of new books in English being issued.

### Question 4

How would you rate your own ability in the elements of each language

Reading, Writing, and Talking?

Very Good

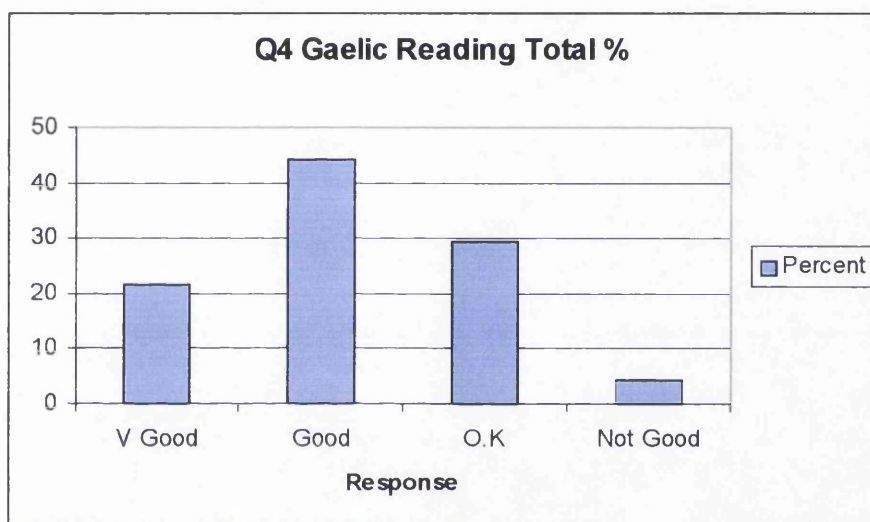
Good

OK

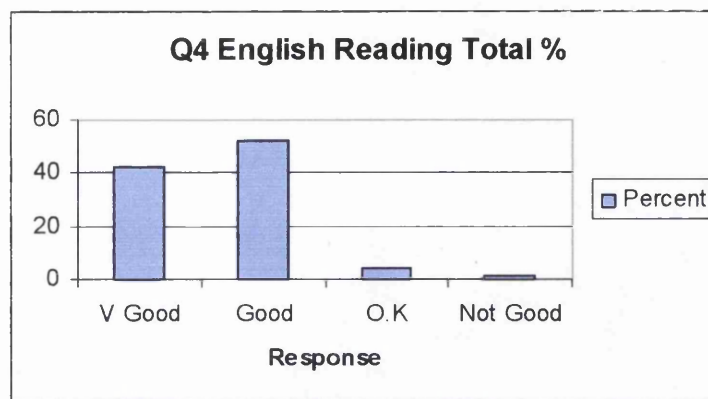
Not Good

*(It should be noted that pupils would have interpreted this question to relate to their abilities in the assessed elements of reading writing and talking.)*

### Reading Responses

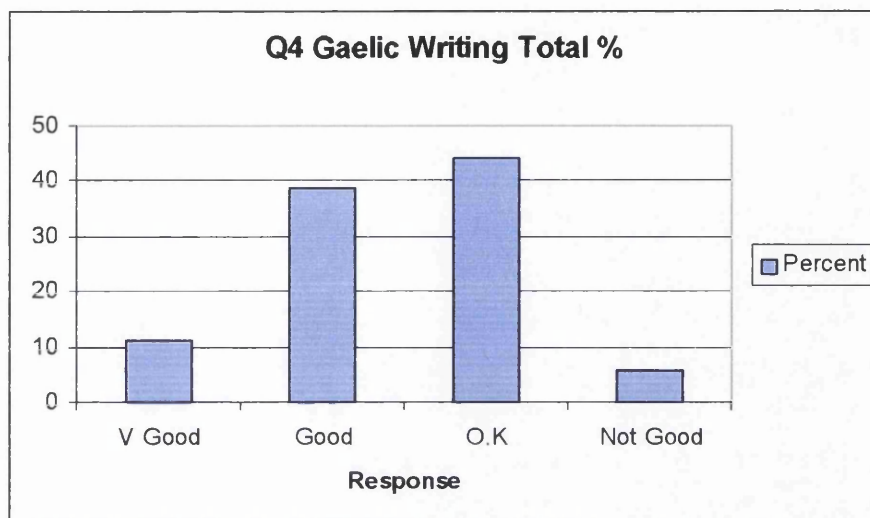


The graph indicates that 66% of pupils recorded that they were 'Good' or 'Very Good' at reading Gaelic and 5% recorded that they were 'Not Good'.

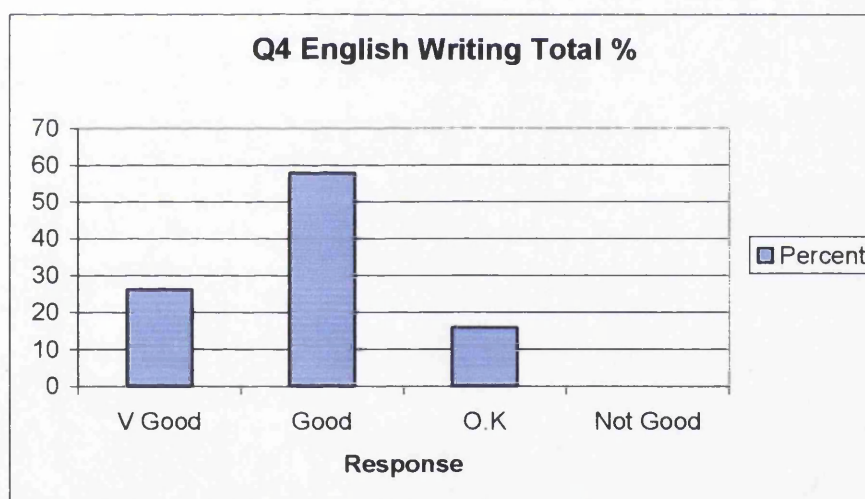


The English reading totals show that 94% of the pupils rated themselves 'Good' or 'Very Good' at English. The reading percentages show that only 6% considered themselves to be 'OK' or 'Not Good' at reading

## Writing Responses

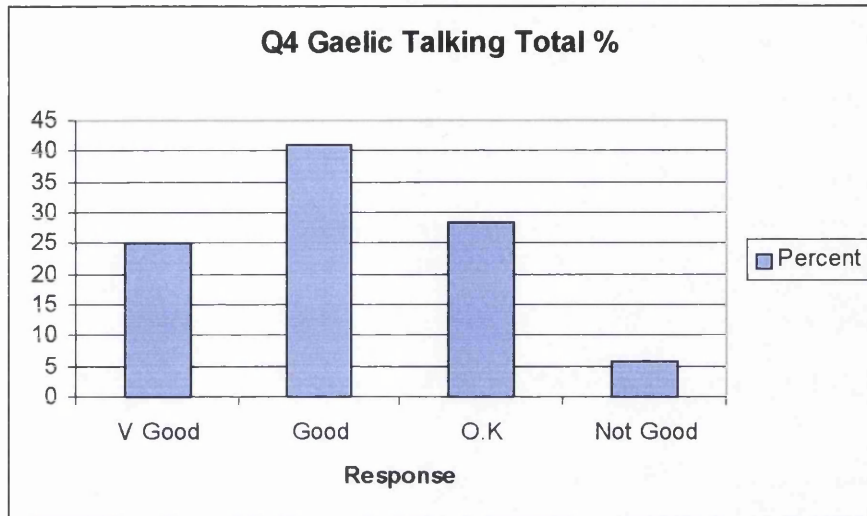


Confidence in writing Gaelic was not as high as for reading, with OK being the most frequent rating (44%) but nevertheless 50% rated themselves good or very good. In Gaelic writing the graph indicates that less than 10% put themselves in the 'Not Good' category.

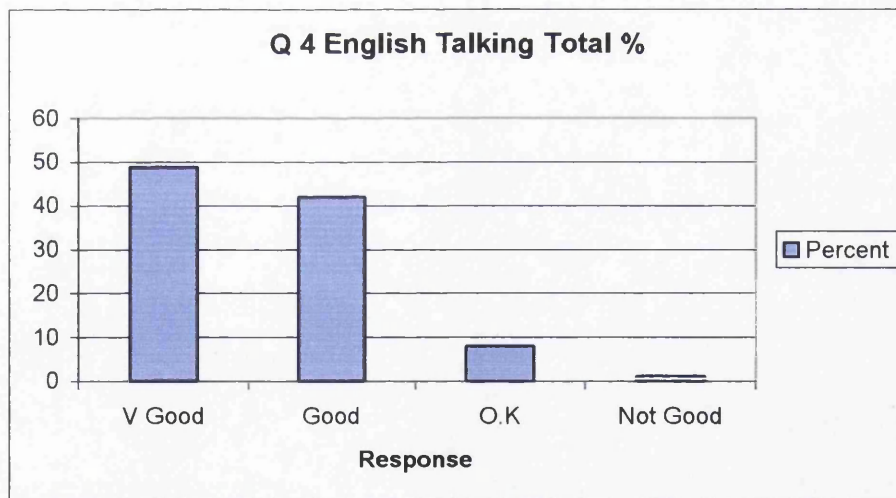


In English writing similarly, pupils rated themselves less highly than in reading but they were nevertheless more confident than in Gaelic with 84% of all pupils in the sample choosing the 'Very Good' and 'Good' categories. 11% more males than females selected the 'OK' category, but that apart there were no significant gender differences.

## Talking Responses



The distribution mirrors the 'Reading' graph but with slightly more pupils rating themselves as 'Very Good' rather than just 'Good'. The graph for 'Gaelic Talking' indicates that one quarter of pupils perceived themselves to be 'Very Good' at talking with only 5% indicating that they were 'Not Good'.



The 'English Talking' responses are very similar to the English reading ones with 91% choosing the top two categories. This compares with 66% choosing the top two in Gaelic. For 'English Talking' the numbers who describe themselves as 'Not Good' drop to 2%. There is an increase in those who describe themselves as 'Very Good' (about half of the

sample.) The numbers who think themselves 'Very Good' in this element in English are higher with the 'OK' and 'Not Good' columns taken together are only 9% of the total.

It may be of interest to consider whether or not these estimates of self reported abilities in the assessed elements of English may be similar for pupils in non Gaelic medium settings. It is also worth noting that although pupils rate themselves less able in Gaelic, the SQA results show consistent high achievement in GM pupils at Higher level in Gaelic. It may be that the more rigorous process in the Gaelic classes of correcting spelling and grammatical errors persuades children that they are not achieving. In English by contrast, the teacher support with folio work up to Standard Grade persuades pupils that they have better ability than may actually be the case.

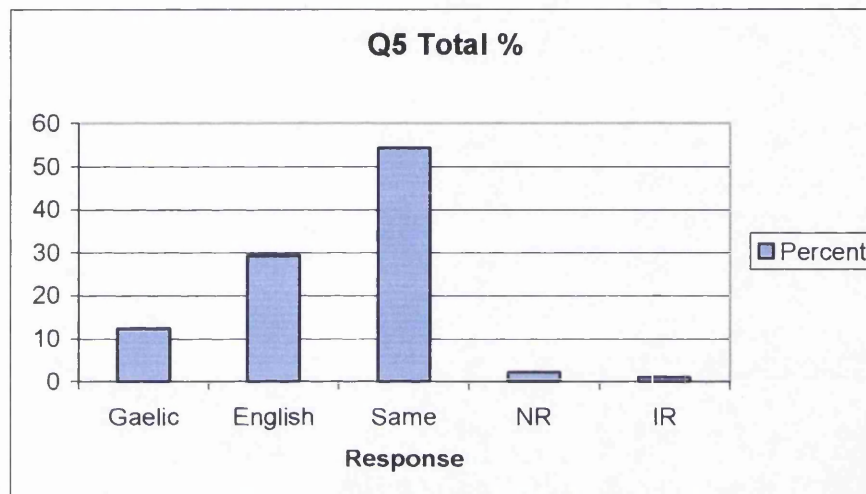


### Question 5

By the end of your primary school education were you more competent in

- a) Gaelic
- b) English
- c) About the same in both

NR = No response    IR = Invalid response



The graph above shows that the favoured option was (c), 'About the same in both.' A large group chose (b), 55%, and only a small amount, 13%, thought that they were more competent in Gaelic by the end of primary school.

The Q5 data indicates that a higher proportion of Lewis pupils, 60% chose Option 'c' and 53% of Uist pupils selected this option. A notably higher proportion of Uist pupils chose Option 'b', 37% i.e. they perceived themselves to have been better at English by the end of primary school. This response was noted in only 18% of the Lewis pupils. (See Appendix B for the tabulated responses to Q5.) This response may have been indicative of a stronger loyalty to Gaelic in Lewis schools than in Uist. There were no significant gender differences.

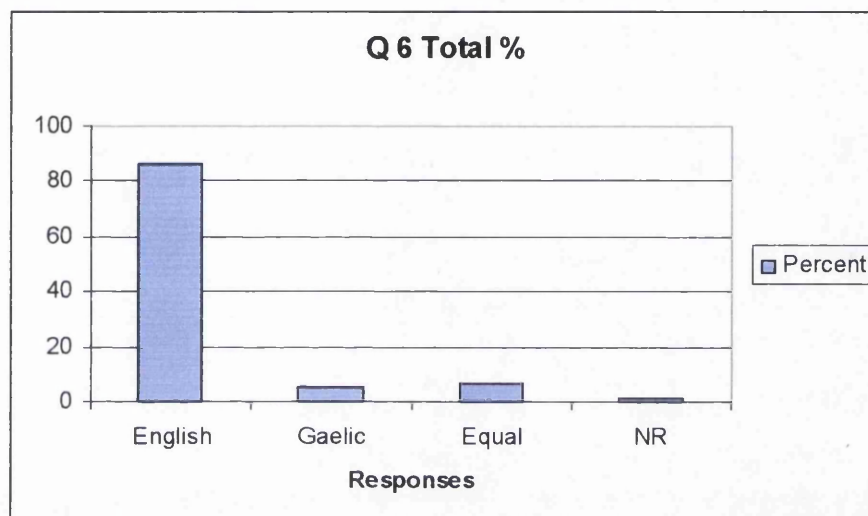
### Question 6

What language did you usually speak in the playground in primary school?

a Mostly English

b Mostly Gaelic

c Both equally



The graph for this question indicates that the vast majority used mostly English in the playground, with the proportions being fairly balanced by gender 82% of males and 89% of females. From the graph it can be seen that a small proportion used Gaelic in the playground, 3% of males and 7% of females. Using both languages equally in the playground was chosen by 12% of males and 4% of females.

In terms of districts the data indicates that 79% of Lewis respondents and 88% of Uist respondents spoke mostly English in the playground. This slightly lower figure of English use was replicated by Lewis pupils for the other categories in this question indicating that the reported use of Gaelic outwith the classroom was slightly stronger in Lewis.

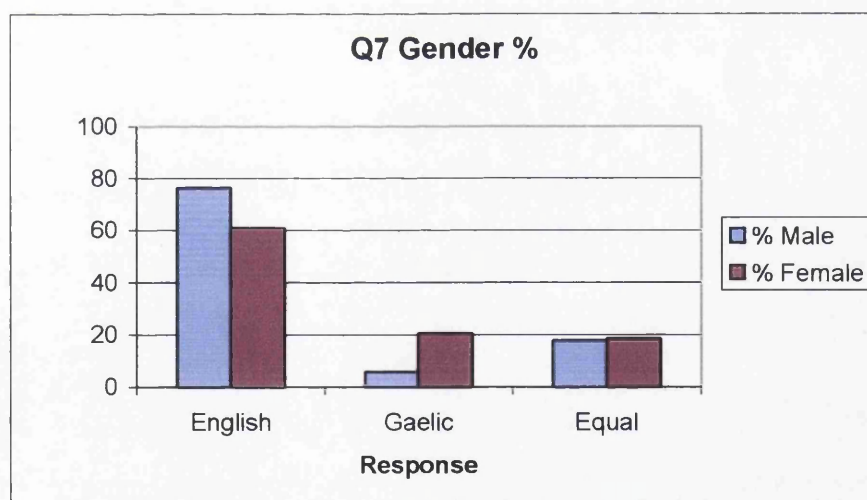
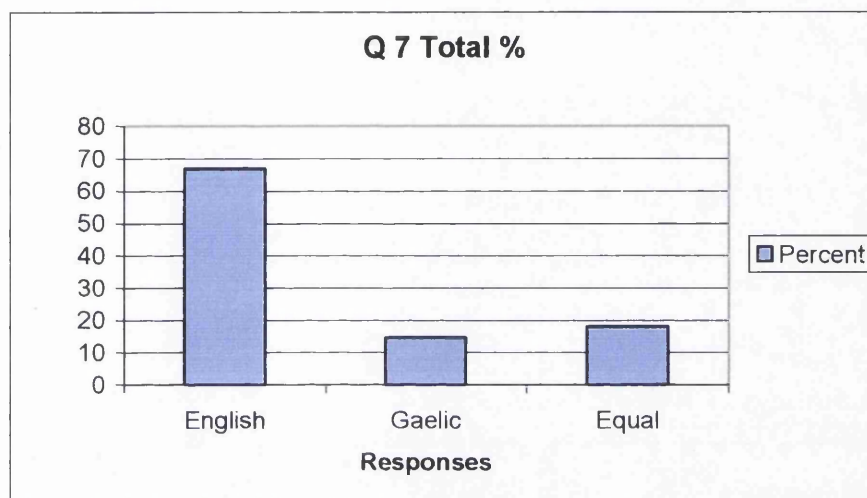
## Question 7

At home did you speak...

a Mostly English

b Mostly Gaelic

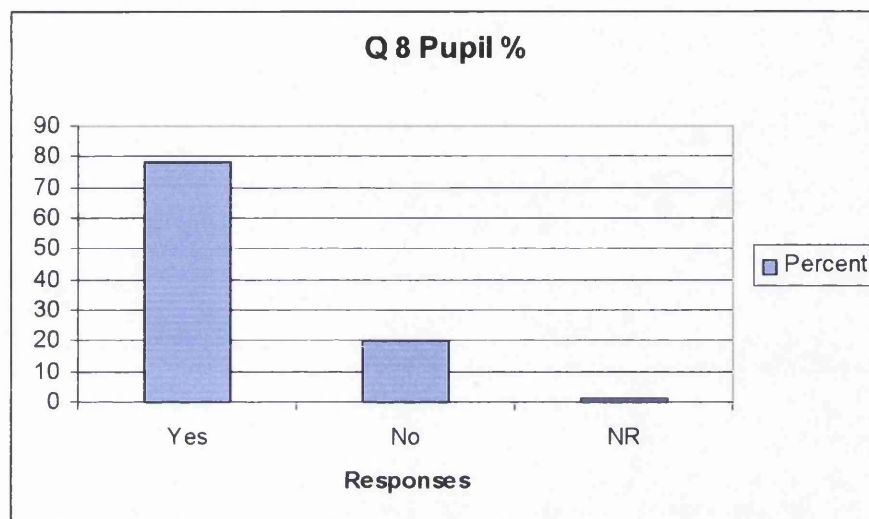
c Both equally



The chart for question 7 shows a large proportion, 67% reported speaking a, 'Mostly English. Only a small proportion, 15% reported speaking Gaelic at home and these were

from Lewis and Uist. A significant difference between Uist and Lewis pupils was noted, (25% compared to 12% (see Appendix B, Q7)).

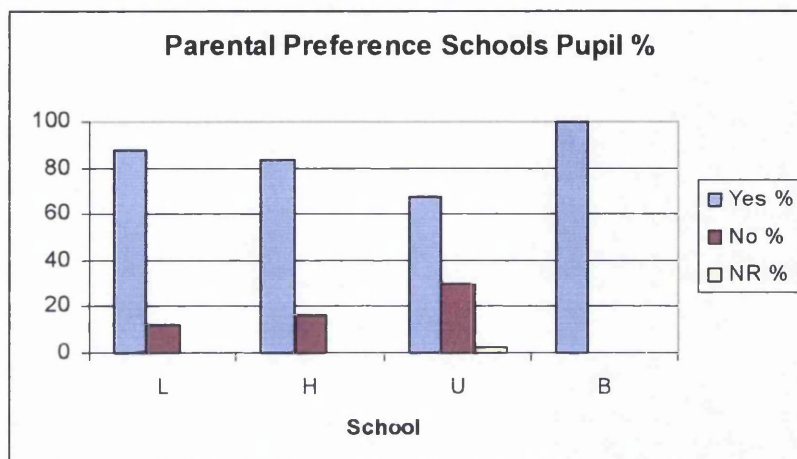
The responses by gender also indicate a much stronger use of Gaelic by females at home. 6% of males and 20% of females spoke 'Mostly Gaelic' at home. This is of interest as it may suggest that language maintenance is potentially stronger in the home among females and this has implications ranging from the numbers continuing with Gaelic to Higher level in secondary school to the future of Gaelic maintenance in the community.

**Question 8****Did your parents prefer you to speak Gaelic at home?****Yes****No****NR = No response.**

The responses to this question show that a large majority of pupils, 79% indicated that parents preferred Gaelic to be used at home. The additional graphs indicate the gender differences and some variations of selections by schools in the localities.

**Do your parents prefer you to speak Gaelic at home? 'Yes,' 'No'**

**Distribution of responses by school.**



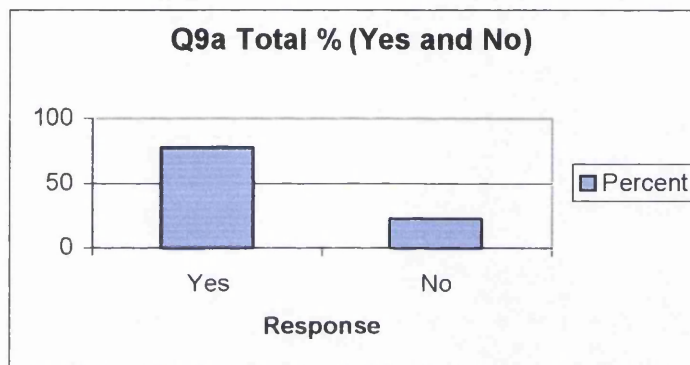
An interesting locality pattern emerged from the reported parental preference of the use of Gaelic. Among the Lewis, Harris and Barra parents there appeared to be similar high percentages making a positive choice for the use of Gaelic in the home. The percentage is lower for Uist (67%). This could be explained by the fact that more children from Lewis came from homes where both parents were fluent. In Uist only 63% of pupils came from homes with two fluent speakers. The results from Barra and Harris have to be treated with care as the sample size was so small (six in each case).

### Question 9

Has the extent to which you have used Gaelic changed as you have grown older?

Yes or No? If yes, please tick the statements you agree with.

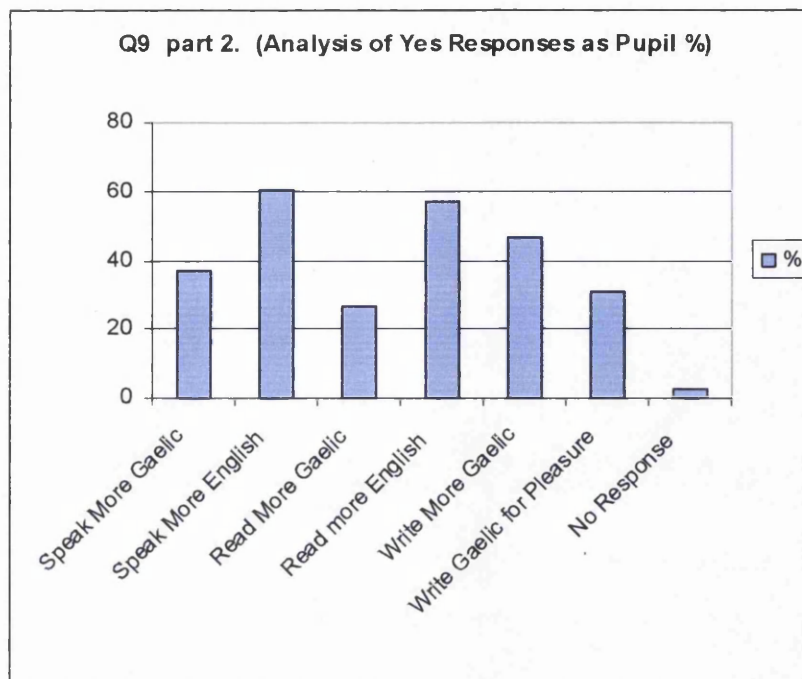
- a I speak more Gaelic than I used to.
- b I speak more English than I used to
- c I read more Gaelic than I used to
- d I read more English than Gaelic for pleasure
- e I write more Gaelic than I did before
- f I write more English than Gaelic for pleasure



The graph is an illustration of the 'Pupil % Response'. 77% thought that their use of Gaelic had increased as they had grown older.

A second part to this question then focused on those pupils who had given a positive answer in the first part of the question in a selection of options ('a' to 'f') to examine those positive factors which they identified from the options.





Although 77% of pupils recorded a change in the extent of their use of Gaelic, this change for the majority, 60% being a decline in their as their use of English increased. Surprisingly 37% reported an increase in their use of Gaelic. This may be indicative of improved confidence in Gaelic use.

It is noticeable that a significant number of pupils recorded an increase in their 'Gaelic Writing'. Option (c), but pupils did record that they write more Gaelic than they used to, 47%. 'Reading Gaelic', was the least favoured with 26%.

The range of uses of language illustrated in the chart (Q9 % of Yes Responses) indicates that English is spoken and read more as it can be seen that (b) 'Speak more English' and (d) 'Read more English' were more strongly favoured – 60% and 57% respectively.

Option (c), 'Reading Gaelic', was the least favoured, 27%, but pupils did record that they write more Gaelic than they used to, 47%. 31% recorded that they write more English than Gaelic for pleasure. As the breakdown for (e), 'Reading more English than Gaelic for pleasure' shows, 19% Uist pupils selecting this as opposed to 27% of Lewis pupils.



It is surprising that so few of the pupils identified an increase in reading. Perhaps this can be explained by the confusion over terminology as comprehension tests are called 'reading.' It could also be that pupils may have spent more time on reading further down in the secondary school or in primary as there are more books for younger readers in Gaelic. Although the writing more Gaelic responses were much higher, 47%, it seems surprising that more pupils did not identify an increase in writing. This could be because in secondary Gaelic is not on the timetable every day and it may seem to pupils that they are writing less frequently than they did in primary.

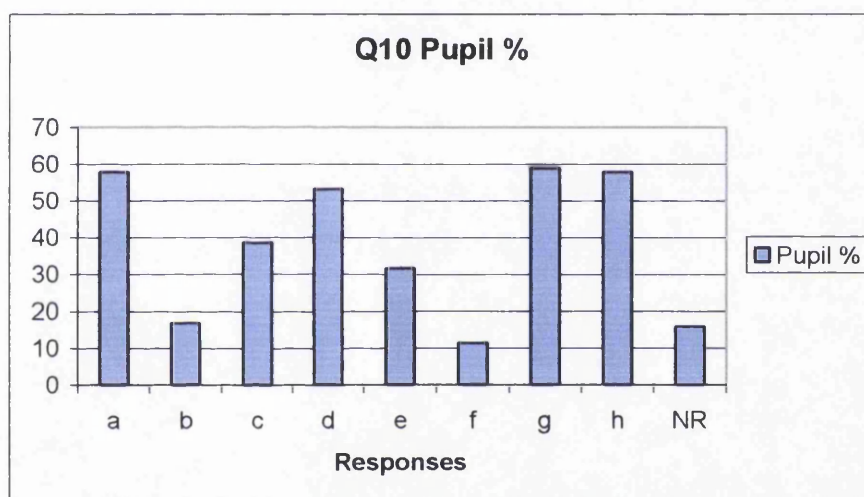
The numbers of positive responses for speaking more Gaelic were low and indicate that pupils use Gaelic less often than before. Further analysis of the geographical spread, however reveals that in option (a), 'Speaking more Gaelic', a significant number of Uist pupils, 40%, mentioned that they speak more Gaelic than they used to. This may indicate that the influence of the school in increasing the amount of Gaelic spoken is significant in Uist where fewer of the pupils have two Gaelic speaking parents. This could also be because the numbers in classes are larger than they were in primary, thus allowing for more talking opportunities. Perhaps also as pupils become more used to the forms of assessment in secondary their confidence improves.

The data also shows that more of the Uist pupils 40% believe that they write more Gaelic than they did before. This may show that the importance of writing as an assessed element is more significant to them than it was earlier in their education (see Appendix B Q9).

### Question 10

Which of the following best describes the reasons for these changes?

- a English is the main language spoken around me
- b I have more opportunities to speak Gaelic
- c I find that books are more difficult in Gaelic
- d I am more likely to read for pleasure in English
- e My Gaelic fluency has improved as there is more written work in Gaelic
- f At home there is more emphasis on improving English
- g Most of the school subjects are taught in English
- h Gaelic is not used much in the playground or outside the classroom



Although this question referred back to Q9 it is not certain whether or not pupils kept this in mind when responding. As some may have perceived it as a 'free standing' question, the results must be treated with caution. Nevertheless, the high levels indicated in 'a', 58% and 'g', 59% are clear indicators of the importance of English in the lives of GM pupils. It is the main language and most school subjects are taught through the medium of English. The dominance of English in secondary school and the limited opportunities to speak Gaelic were issues that seemed to be emerging from the data. These points led to some interesting discussion and comment at the interviews with pupils which are discussed later in Chapter 5

Not very many pupils thought that there are more opportunities to speak Gaelic as they have grown older as can be seen in response 'b'. Only 17% selected this response. However, pupils also recorded that they thought their Gaelic fluency had improved as there are more opportunities to practice written work in secondary. This is more or less in keeping with the response to 'e' in Q9 (*I write more Gaelic than I did before*). A fairly high proportion thought that books were more difficult in Gaelic and it can be seen from the responses that a high proportion, 53% read English for pleasure.

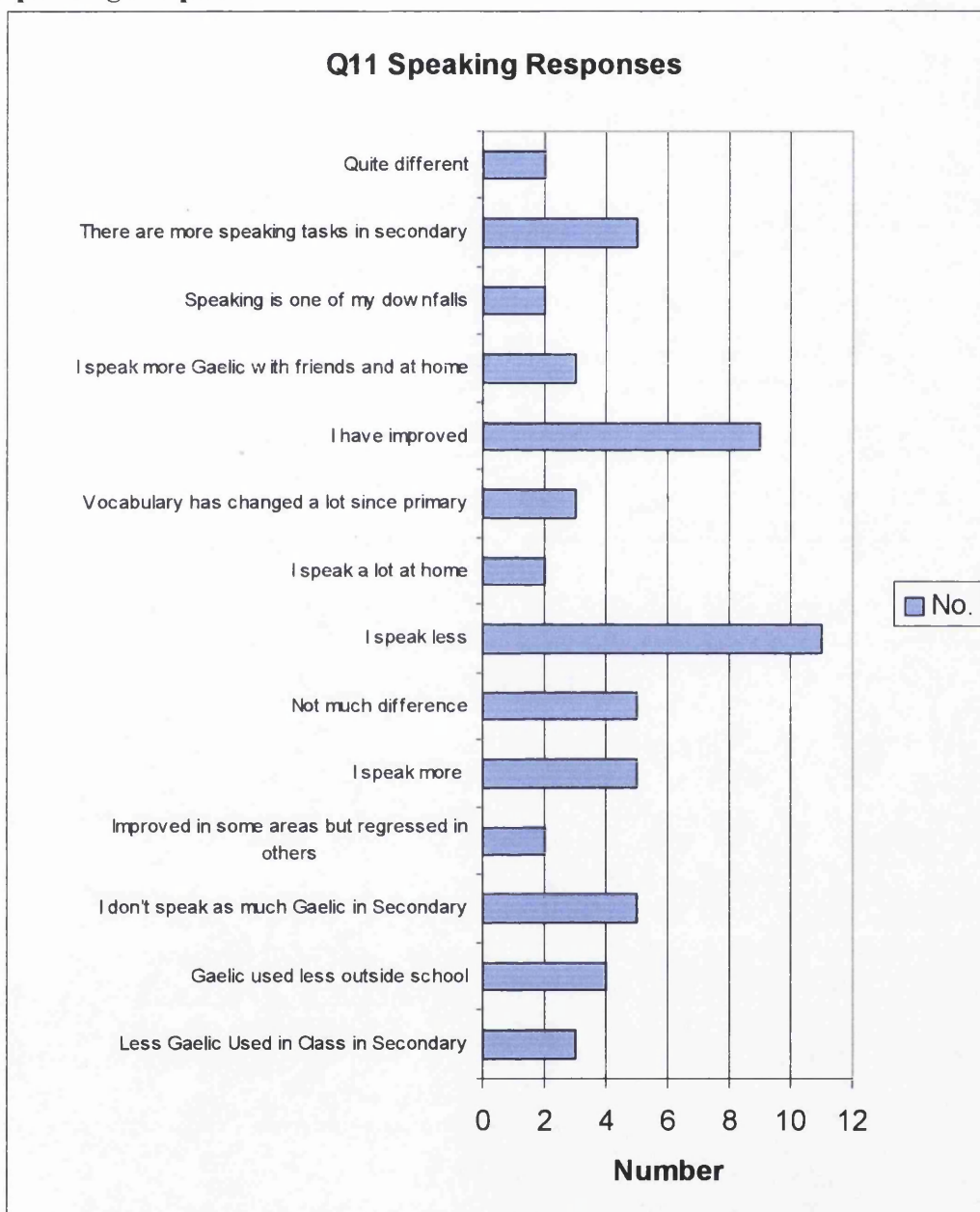
Despite the noted awareness of the dominance of English there is an acknowledgement that Gaelic fluency improves with practice. Very few recorded that there was more of an emphasis at home on improving English and this suggests that parents may be less anxious about their children not achieving in English because of having a Gaelic-medium education.

Issues to do with the use of Gaelic in the home and in other settings were discussed in the interviews and recorded in Chapter 5.

### Question 11

Write down in your own words how coming to secondary has made a difference to the amount of Gaelic that you speak, read and write.

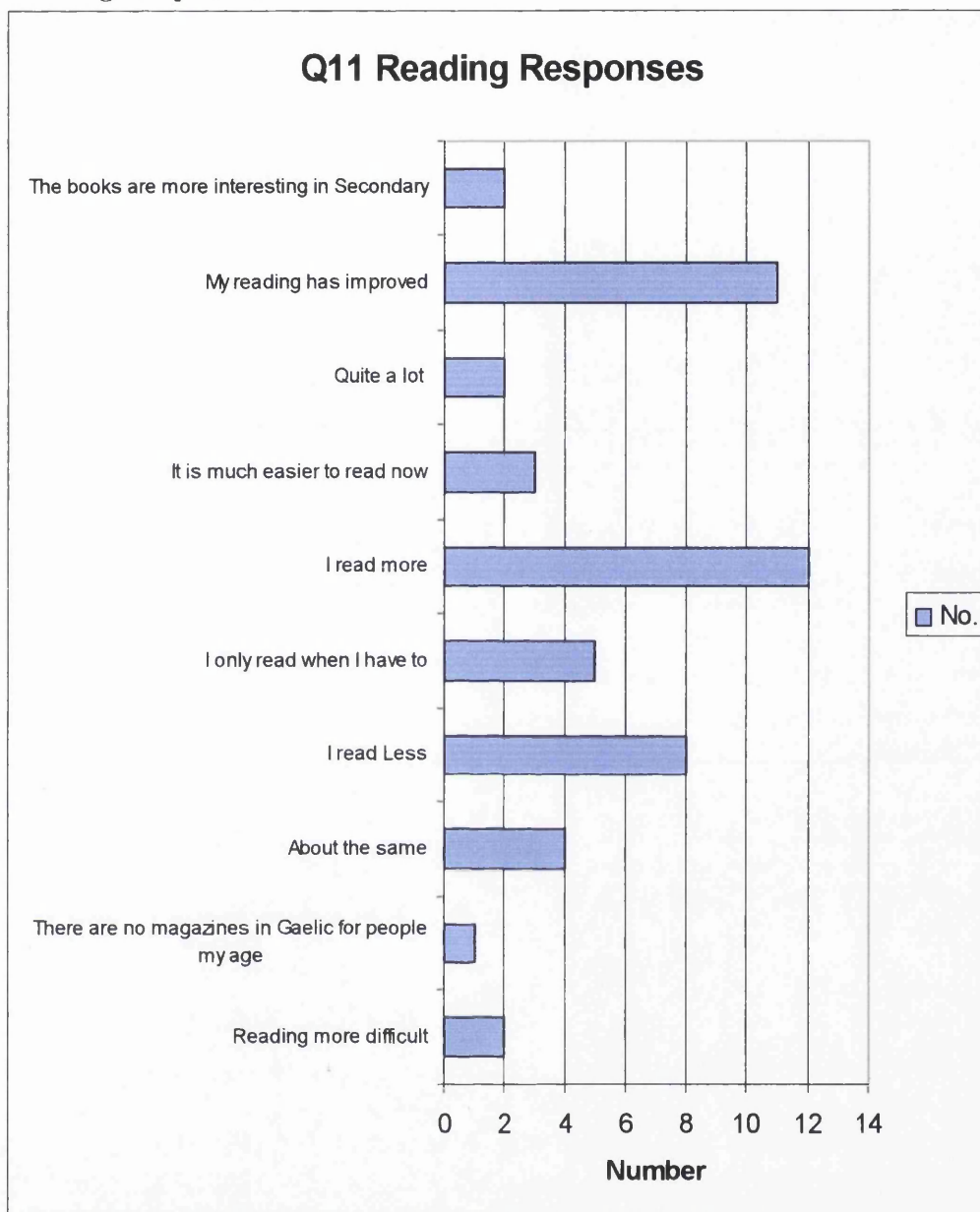
#### Speaking Responses



The graphs for this question interpret a wide spread of comments and are intended to give a flavour of the actual responses made by pupils. The above graph represents the picture

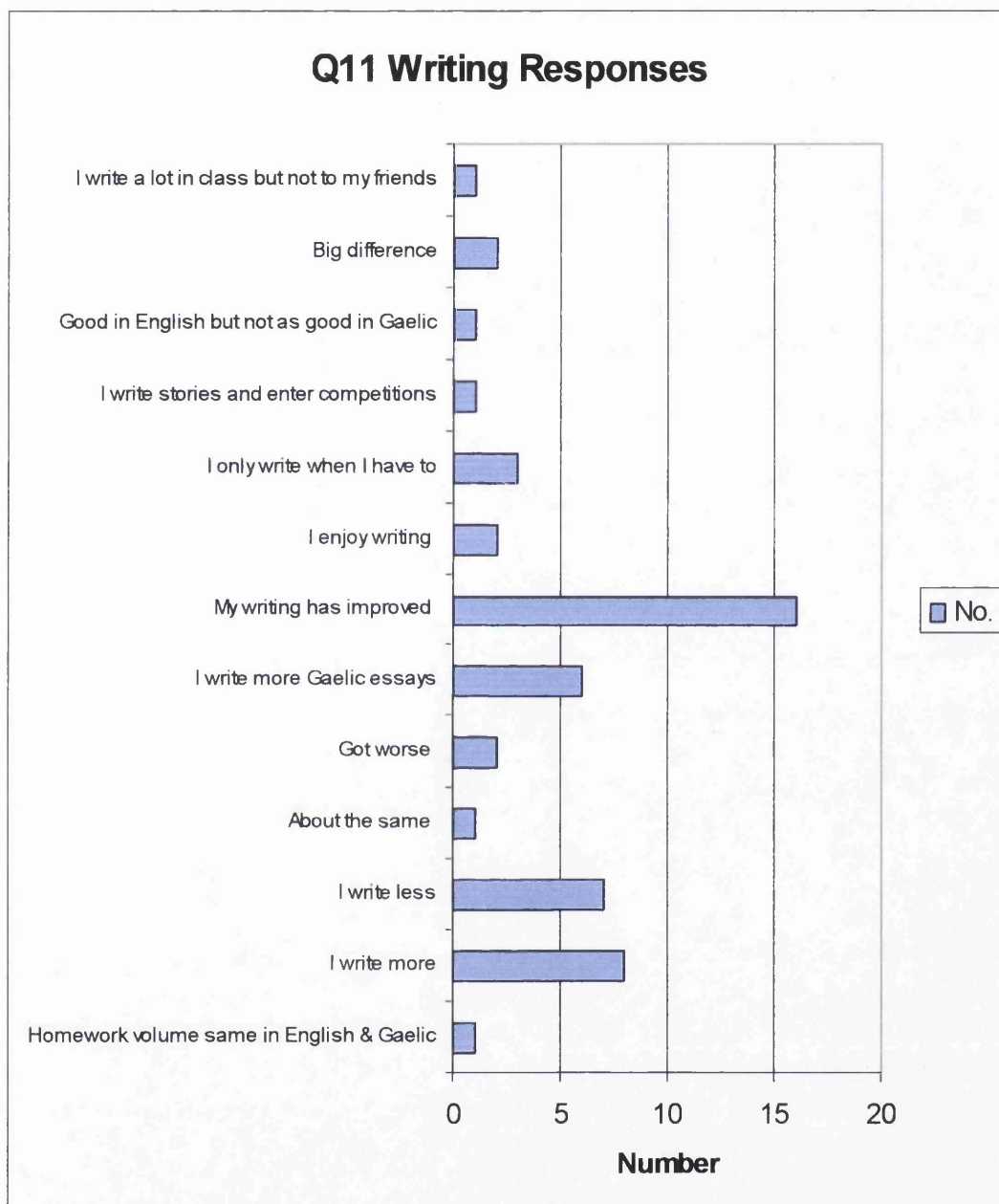
that emerged of the pupils feelings about speaking Gaelic. It is interesting to note that although pupils indicate that they do not speak as much Gaelic in secondary they note that they have improved in speaking. This could be related to the fact that they also indicate that there are more talking tasks in secondary which equates with the formalising of speaking as an assessed element of Standard Grade courses. Although they speak less, and use Gaelic less outside school they still feel that they have improved. This point was followed up in the interview situation in groups, Chapter 5. In the interviews, pupils did note that they found the more formalised approach to tasks in secondary daunting. There seems also to be a realisation that they are widening their knowledge and vocabulary although the contexts for using Gaelic are becoming more restricted.

## Reading Responses



Although it must be borne in mind that the numbers of the responses are small and the results impressionistic, the graph indicates that pupils identify improvement in reading and the fact that they read more Gaelic books at home. This also is in keeping with the demands of a more formalised curriculum. On the negative side there are comments indicating that some pupils read less and that reading has become more difficult. A pupil noted that there were no Gaelic magazines for young people.

## Writing Responses



On the graph there was an indication that pupils felt that they had improved in writing and that they wrote more Gaelic, particularly essay writing. There is little indication that Gaelic is used functionally outside the classroom but one pupil noted using Gaelic to write stories and enter competitions and two noted that they enjoyed writing. There were very few completely negative comments.

The charts are a distillation of responses that have been grouped together and as such are impressionistic. Nevertheless they provide a global indication of pupil views on their Gaelic skills.

A review of responses by school can be seen in Appendix B, Q11.



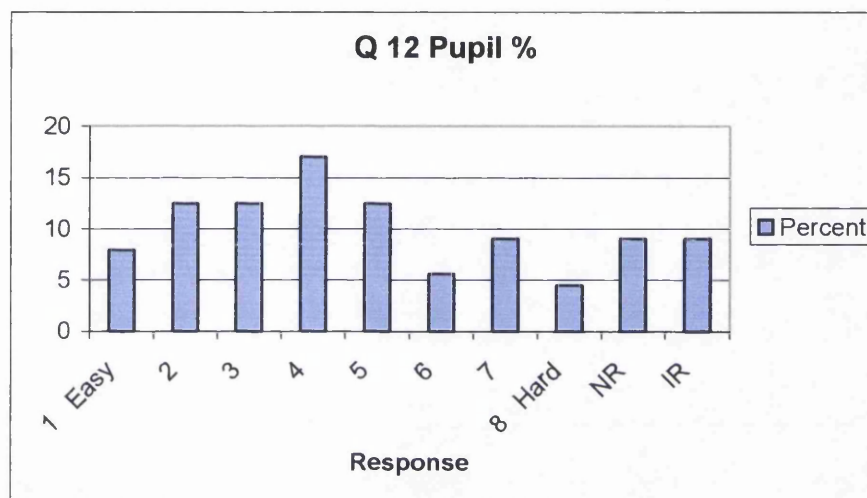
### Question 12

How do you rate Gaelic in terms of difficulty compared to other subjects you are studying? Arrange your subjects on the line below in order of difficulty starting with the easiest.

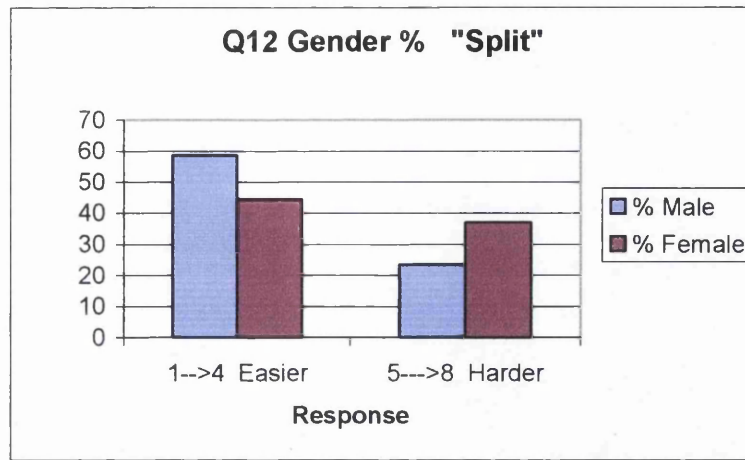
1 Easy \_\_\_\_\_ 8 Hard

NR = No response

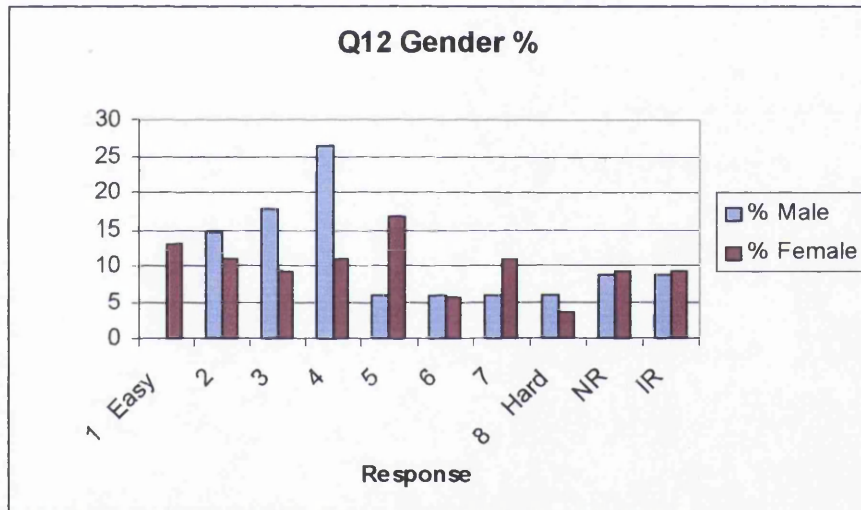
IR = Invalid response



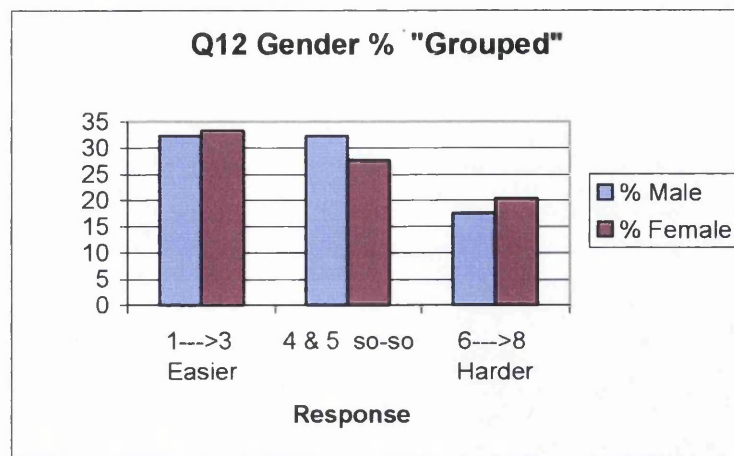
In this chart, although only a small percentage, 8% selected option 1, showing that they thought Gaelic to be the easiest subject the responses tended to indicate that the majority found Gaelic relatively easier than other subjects 50% placed it between 1 and 4 in terms of difficulty and 31% placed it between 5 and 8. The schools have an eight-subject curriculum in S3 and S4. A further analysis showing a bi-polar split reveals the pupils perception of Gaelic in relation to other subjects



This bipolar grading reinforces the impression of male confidence in believing Gaelic to be easier than other subjects but the global gender graph shows that no males chose option 1.



The global gender chart however shows that males were significantly higher in options 2, 3 and 4.



An analysis of the results in terms of 'Easy' (1 to 3), 'So-So', (4 and 5), and 'Hard' (6 to 8) indicates that the breakdown by percentage is fairly even.

4.5% recorded it as the hardest subject. The geographical spread shows that more Lewis pupils, 18% of them, selected Option 1 'Easy' responses but the numbers were still small, No pupils from Uist selected this 'Easy' option. Appendix B, Q12 shows further geographical and numerical data.

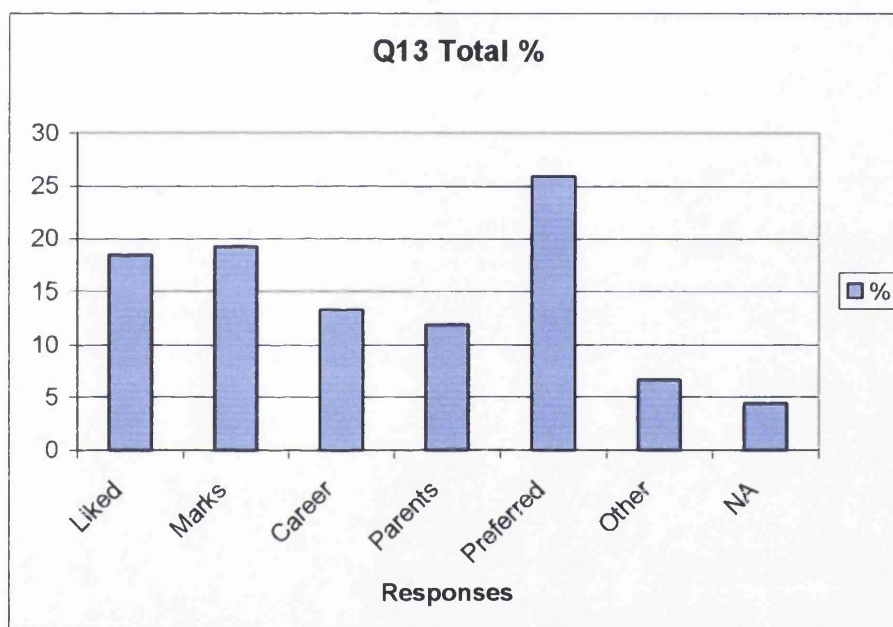
The graphs indicate that pupils feel comfortable with their progress in Gaelic.

### Question 13

Why did you choose Gaelic as a subject at the end of S2? Tick the box which best describes your reason.

- a I liked the subject
- b I got high marks in S2 assessment
- c There are career prospects in Gaelic related jobs
- d I was influenced by my parents
- e I preferred it to other language options on the timetable
- f Other reasons

NA = Not Applicable



As the graph shows the responses to Q13 indicate that e, language preference, and b, high marks, 19% were the preferred options. A total of 26% made the selection, on the basis of preferring Gaelic to other language options and 19% chose on the basis of their Gaelic marks. Interestingly 19% also chose it because they liked it. The influence of parents on choice was small, 12% which is of interest as all of the parents would have chosen GM for their children in primary school. This suggests that pupils are making a choice that they

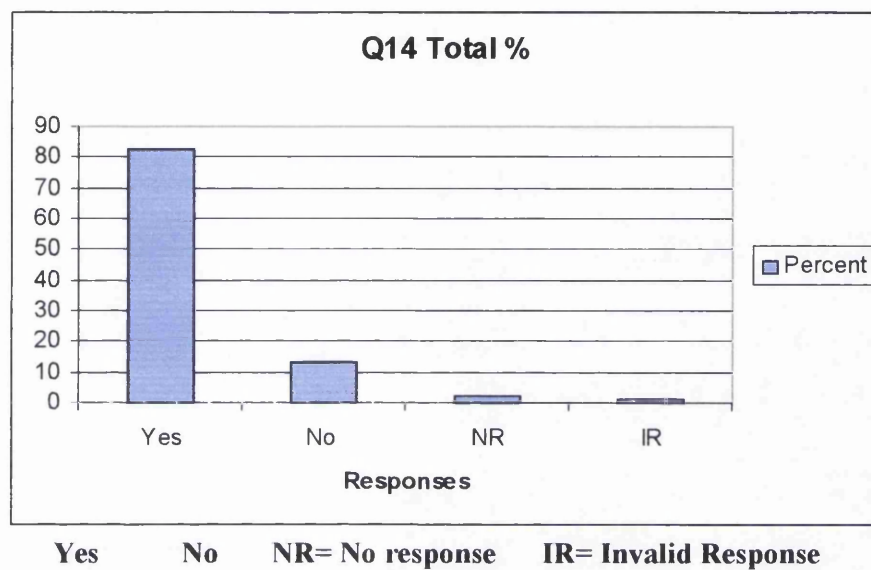
themselves perceive to be viable. The viability of Gaelic as a school subject choice and life choice was considered in Chapters 5 and 6.

The only option where there was a significant gender difference was option (a). Significantly more girls than boys chose Gaelic because they liked it (33% of girls compared to 21% of boys; see Appendix B, Q13 for the actual numbers of responses).

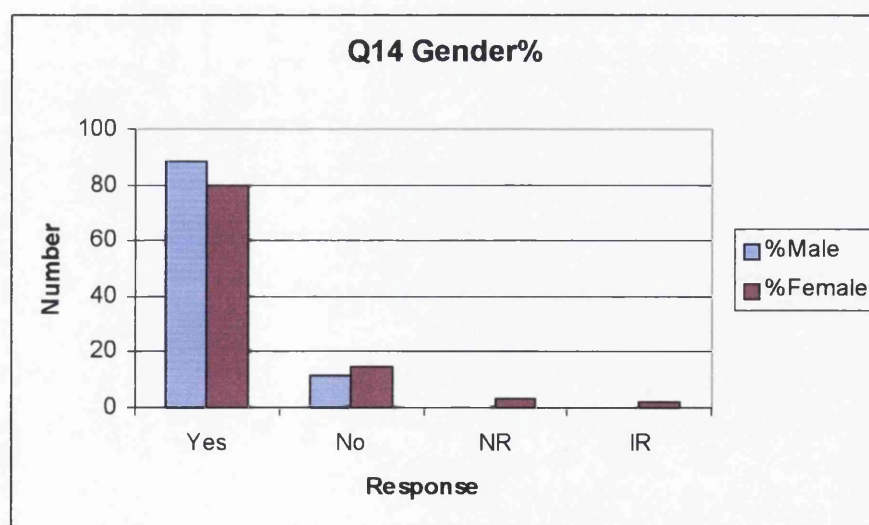
A small proportion, 9% selected 'other reasons' but did not specify the reasons. The Barra pupils chose not to respond to this question as they had not formally completed their curriculum choices and felt that the wording of the question made it not applicable to them.

### Question 14

Are you happy that you chose Gaelic at the end of S2?



The information from this question indicates that most pupils are happy with their opportunity to choose Gaelic at the end of S2. It seems likely that despite reservations expressed regarding the demands of the coursework and assessment, pupils are still glad to have chosen Gaelic in secondary. Question 15 tracks their reasons more closely.



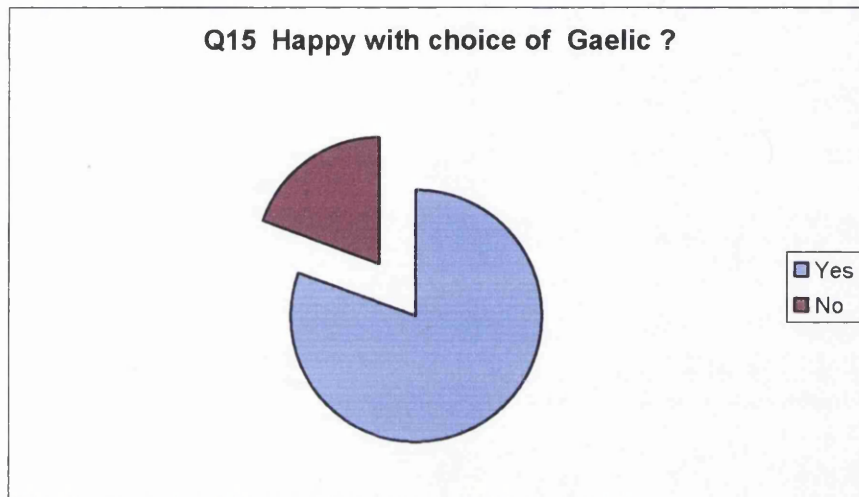
Of the males 88% chose the 'Yes' option as opposed to 80% of females. This may be explained by the fact that according to their responses to Question 12, more boys than girls thought Gaelic was easier than other subjects.

The Barra pupils unexpectedly responded to this question although they had not quite reached the stage of formally choosing Gaelic as a subject. It can be assumed that their response indicates a willingness to continue with Gaelic beyond S1 and S2 and presumes that they will choose it in S3 as is usually the case with native speakers.



### Question 15

**Are you still happy that you chose Gaelic? Give your reasons why or why not.**



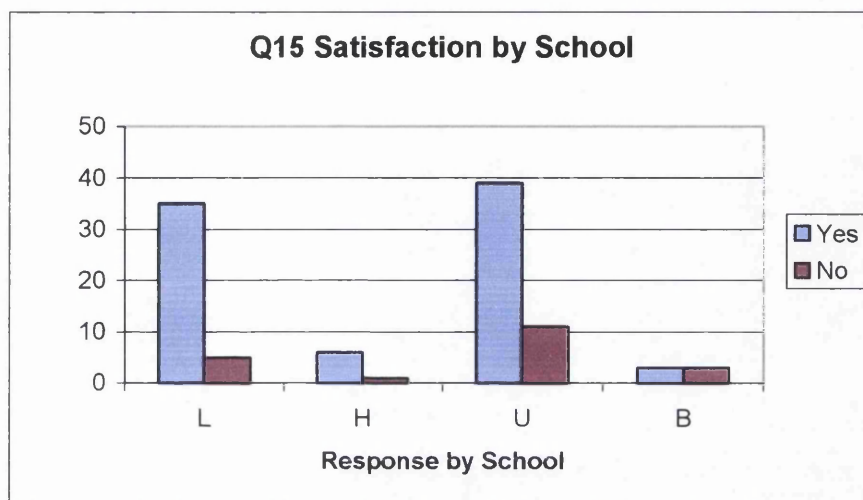
This question aimed to ascertain the scope of reasons of the pupils' interest and enthusiasm for Gaelic. Pupils were asked to give a simple why or why not response and the graph displays the overwhelming numbers of positive responses.

Reasons for being happy with their choice of Gaelic are wide ranging and some of them revealed underlying attitudes about Gaelic, for example it could provide career openings or it was a lesser of evils compared to other language choices. Some responses were more straightforward, for example pupils found it easy. Some felt that their skills had improved or it enabled them to talk to more people and possibly to older people. One pupil added a rueful postscript, *'I would have preferred Standard Grade PE.'*

The interviews which followed the questionnaire allowed scope for exploring pupils' feelings about their choice of Gaelic and this has been addressed in Chapter 5. Appendix B to Q15 shows the range of results based on positive and 'negative' comments given.



The information in the graph, 'Satisfaction by School' illustrates the interpretation of responses by geographical area.



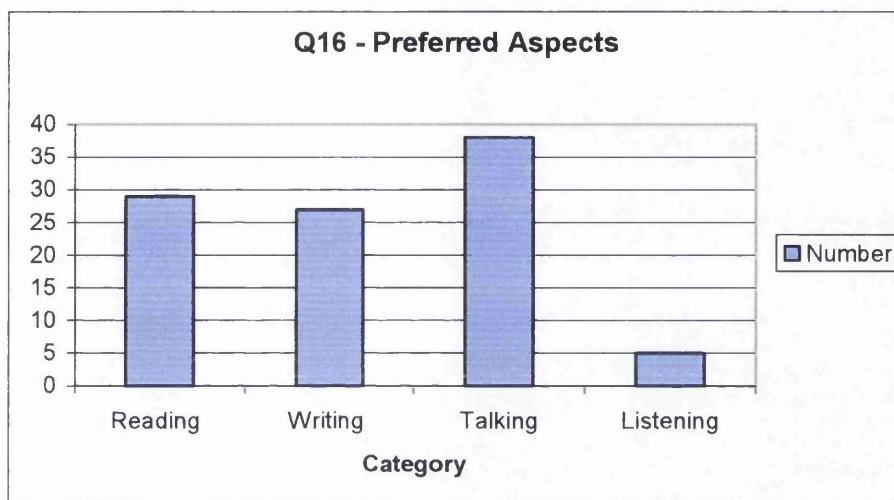
The graph indicates that Uist pupils gave more of a variety of positive and negative responses. As expected by the demographic situation (fewer fluent parents) there are positive and negative responses. But on balance the positive responses far outweigh the negative ones. This is encouraging given that fewer of them would have had a high level of home support in terms of having two fluent speaking parents. Uist is also unusual in having had a large section of the community as non Gaelic speakers due to the presence of military and Ministry of Defence support personnel.

The Barra school results are based on their *intention* to choose Gaelic, (or not) as they were on second year at the time of being interviewed. The other schools show a high percentage of positive responses which can be reviewed in Appendix B, Q15.

## Question 16

Which aspects of studying Gaelic do you enjoy the most and why?

Reading      Writing      Talking      Listening

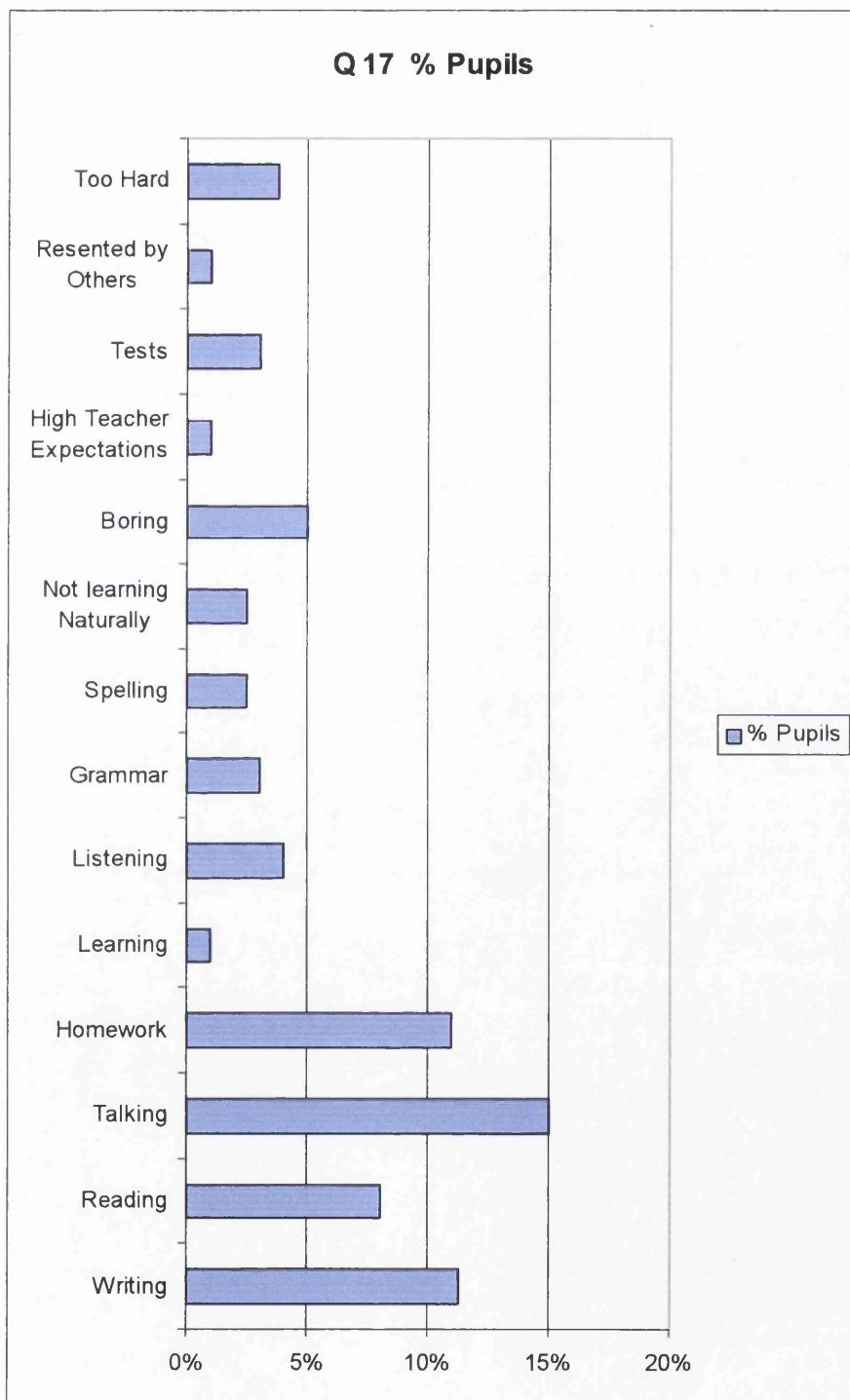


The graphs were calculated on the basis of pupils indicating their views on the various assessed elements of Gaelic and on their comments positive and negative about studying Gaelic. The calculations are based on impressions gleaned from the numbers of responses. It is evident that most pupils are happy with the study of the elements of Gaelic, reading, writing, talking (or speaking) and listening. Their preferred element is talking. Very few enjoyed listening, but as this is an assessed element which is new to them in secondary there is probably a difficulty in coming to terms with this element.

This question aimed to tease out the pupils' interests and possible concerns about the assessed elements. It is of interest that many pointed to talking in this question and as an area of preference. This result was clearly higher than for the elements of reading and writing. However, I was to discover in the group interview situation that those who had problems with talking had strong feelings about it. A similar situation can exist in English classes as some pupils are very reserved and find the assessment of talking in front of their peers daunting. Given these possible pupil reservations about the assessment of talking it is encouraging that it was the highest preferred option.

**Question 17**

Thinking about Question 16, please write a few sentences mentioning anything you dislike about studying Gaelic.



In this question pupils were asked to give an indication of anything they disliked and in that sense it is the obverse of Q16. The graph illustrates the spread of aspects of studying Gaelic that pupils disliked. A fairly high proportion did not respond and from this it can be inferred that they had no strong dislikes. Of those who responded some actually indicated that they had no dislikes. All the assessed elements appeared in their responses and not surprisingly homework featured prominently as something they disliked but only a few thought that Gaelic was too hard. A number of comments related to pupils' dislike of spelling and grammar. Dislike of talking could also relate to the feelings pupils have about giving a speaking performance in front of their peers.

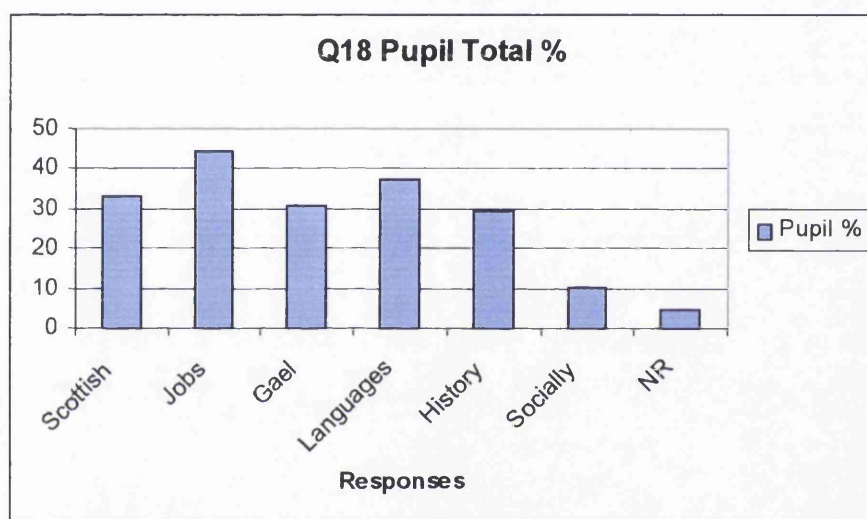
The range of dislikes were similar to those that I as a researcher would have expected from pupils of this age. What is of interest in this question however is some of the categories of comments that were made. Comments such as 'resented by other pupils' and 'high teacher expectations' were followed up in the pupil interviews in Chapter 5 as they suggested interesting avenues for discussion.

A summary of pupils' written responses can be seen in Appendix B, Q17.

### Question 18

Having been through the Gaelic medium system, what do you think Gaelic has done for you? Respond to the following.

- a Gaelic makes me feel more Scottish
- b Gaelic gives me more job opportunities
- c Gaelic makes me proud to be a Gael
- d Gaelic has made me better at languages
- e Gaelic has made me more aware of the history of the Highlands and Islands
- f Gaelic has given me a better social life

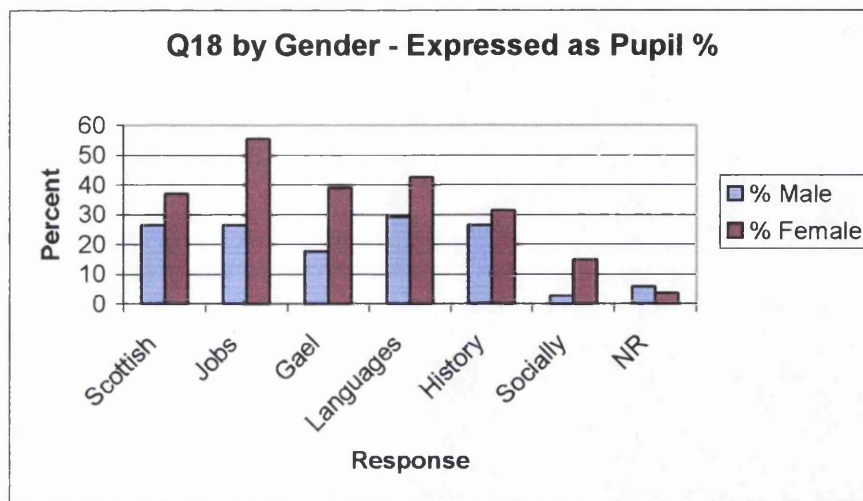


In this question the benefits identified by the most pupils are job opportunities. Pupils can see the value of studying Gaelic for this reason even though it may not have been a factor in their original choice. Job opportunities were identified by 44%. Although career possibilities were only important to 13% of pupils in their original choice of Gaelic. (See Q13) Q18 was interpreted as a more open question about Gaelic education in general whereas Q13 related more to the study of Gaelic as a secondary school subject. Nevertheless the growing recognition of job opportunities through Gaelic is significant. It is evident that there is an awareness of the possible benefits to career prospects of studying Gaelic. Improved ability in languages 38% is an interesting statistic as it is also a recognition of the wider benefits of studying Gaelic.

It seems too that the broader issues surrounding Gaelic have some meaning to pupils at this stage. The graph shows that 33% feel that Gaelic makes them more Scottish and a similar proportion have pride in being a Gael. It is notable too that as many as 30% have an awareness of the importance of the history of the highlands and islands as the study of cultural heritage is not a prominent feature of Gaelic as a secondary school subject.

A small percentage, 10% thought that Gaelic had contributed to their social life. This was later discussed at interviews. The figure is small as pupils identified in the interviews that their age group has stopped being targeted by support groups such as *Sradagan* and to some extent the social dimension offered by the media had fallen away as the focus on Gaelic pupils stops with the Gaelic programme *Dé a Nis?* which is aimed at the under twelves. Pupils interviewed could see that Gaelic had had a social dimension when they were younger but as teenagers their social lives functioned in an entirely English setting.





In terms of gender, choices (a) 'Feeling more Scottish' and (c) 'Being proud to be a Gael' were recorded by far more females than males. The girls also had a far stronger recognition of the possible job prospects that Gaelic might bring, showing a two to one dominance in this option. Boys may have tended to perceive that the Gaelic jobs available (e.g., teaching, the media) were more for girls than boys.

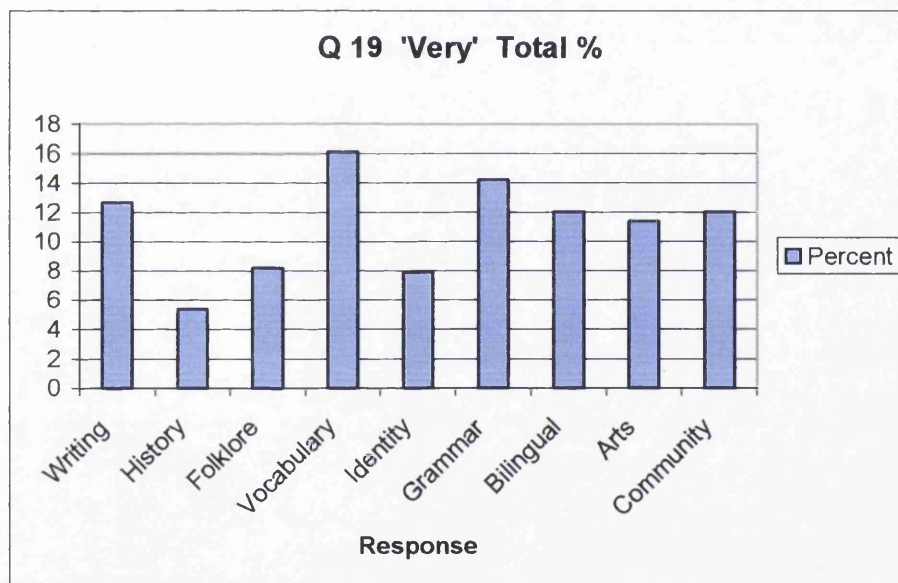
Males recorded that studying Gaelic had made them 'better at languages' in general. Overall their selections were markedly lower in this question. A possible explanation is that boys may have tended to interpret this question as one which asked to describe feelings and there may therefore have been a reticence about responding.

### Question 19

How important have the following been to you in your Gaelic education?

Very / Fairly

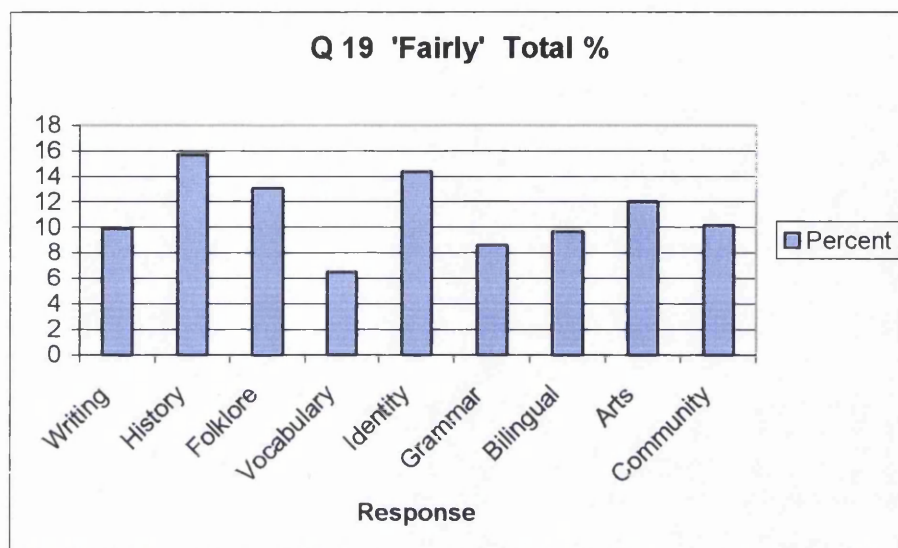
- a Gaining fluency in the written language
- b Learning about the history of the Gaelic speaking people
- c Learning about Gaelic folklore, poetry, songs, customs
- d Developing an extensive vocabulary
- e Becoming aware of your identity as a Gael
- f Learning a system of grammar
- g Being able to express thoughts and ideas with the same level of fluency as in English (being bilingual)
- h Enjoying Gaelic Radio, TV, Music, Performing Arts
- i Being more effective as a member of a Gaelic community



The 'Very' totals are quite evenly spread in the cases of (b), (c), (e), (h) and (i). This suggests that things to do with culture, history, the arts and Gaelic identity are not so important as the practical aspects of learning Gaelic effectively. Gaining an extensive vocabulary is the highest selected followed by learning grammar. The importance to the pupils of their technical skills in Gaelic was of interest and merited further exploration at



the interviews as the graphs indicate a high awareness of what the schools prioritised as important in the study of Gaelic.



The highest 'Fairly' scores are for (b) 'learning the history of Gaelic speaking people', chosen by 16% of the sample, and (e) 'becoming aware of Gaelic identity' chosen by 14%. Awareness of identity stands out as being the second highest category selected in the fairly important category and this is interesting as it was not an issue that I considered would be highlighted by this age group of pupils.

The findings must be interpreted with caution however as the 'Fairly' option may have been viewed negatively by the pupils i.e. as the converse of 'Very'. It is interesting that the lowest options in the 'Fairly important' graph also refer specifically to Gaelic culture and identity issues.

The fact that cultural benefits of Gaelic have a low importance in the charts may also suggest that pupils interpreted the question as meaning that certain aspects were important in the learning process rather than important to them personally. This could also suggest that pupils see the academic learning process as being the entire purpose of their education in Gaelic.

There was a clear indication that identity had begun to be fairly important to pupils and it may be that the identity issue is of greater interest to GM pupils than it is to English medium ones. I have mentioned the significance of the research of Margaret Nicolson, who studied identity referencing amongst university students, and discovered that identity was more important to students of a bilingual background than to others.<sup>134</sup> This issue is further discussed in the conclusion to the thesis.

A breakdown of all responses together with gender percentages can be seen in Appendix B, Q19.

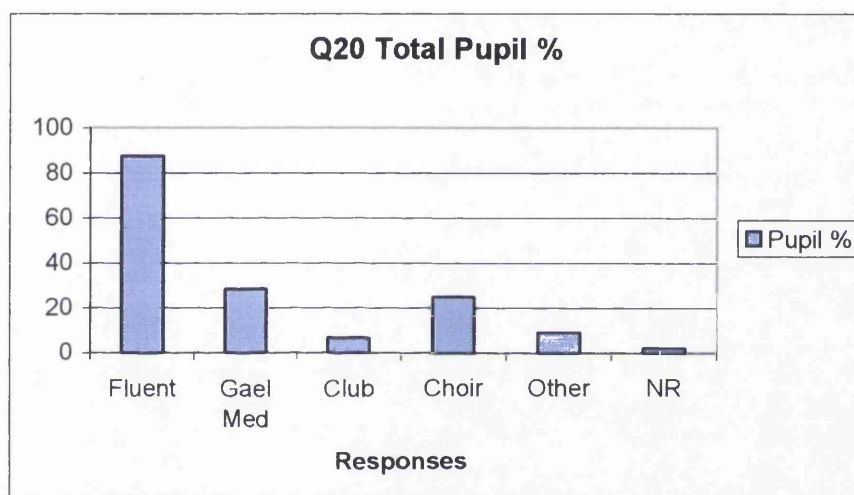
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<sup>134</sup> Nicolson M. "Language and Who We Are," *Scottish Educational Review*, vol. 35, no. 2, 134

## Question 20

In primary school Gaelic Medium pupils formed a distinct group. What experiences have you had in secondary school of Gaelic groupings?

- a Being in a fluent Gaelic class
- b Studying another subject or subjects through the medium of Gaelic
- c Being in a Gaelic school club
- d Being a member of a Gaelic school choir
- e Other



In this question being in the Gaelic class itself emerged unsurprisingly as the most selected Gaelic grouping and was selected by 88%. This reinforces again the perception that pupils have of Gaelic environment being restricted to studying Gaelic as a subject. It is notable that less than 30 % had the opportunity, or chose to avail themselves of the opportunity to study other subjects through the medium of Gaelic. This was an issue raised by me subsequently in the questionnaire sent to parents and discussed in Chapter 6.

There was little significant difference by gender overall in the sample for this question but the fact that some boys were in Gaelic choirs was of interest. Being in a Gaelic choir accounted for a significant number, 25%. Of males the males 8% were members of choirs.

An analysis by geographical location shows that in Uist more pupils were in a Gaelic choir than were studying other subjects through the medium of Gaelic.

What is also of interest in this question is that so few pupils are members of Gaelic clubs but this is because there are few opportunities available. Where there are activities on offer a certain proportion of pupils will take part which is evidenced by the fact that some boys will even join choirs, an activity regarded as a predominantly girl domain. Only six pupils indicated that they had been in a Gaelic school club and these were all Uist pupils. Of the females 11% belonged to school clubs.

## Question 21

Do you hear Gaelic being spoken in your school outwith the classroom?

Rarely      Regularly      Quite Often      Very Often

**P:** By other pupils

**NGT:** By Teaching staff, not Gaelic teachers

**GT:** By Gaelic teachers

**NTS:** By members of staff who are not teachers

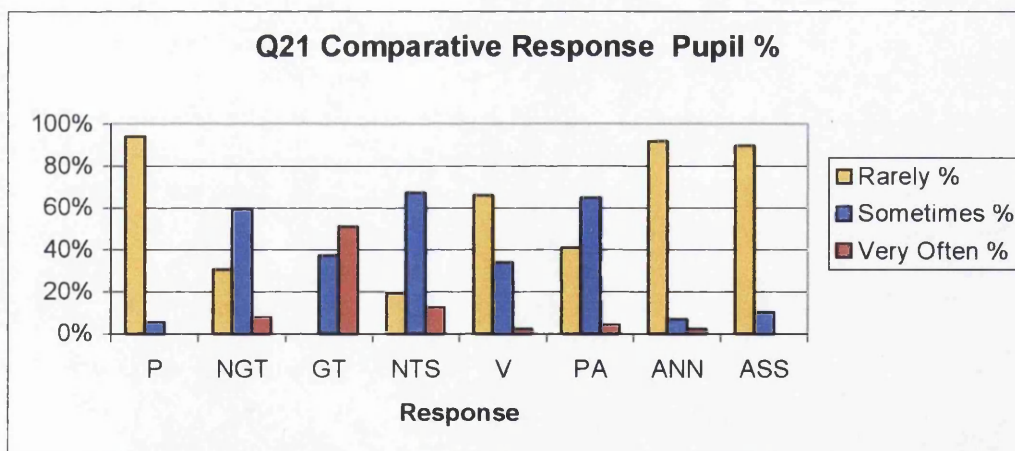
**V:** By official visitors

**Pa** By visiting parents

**ANN:** In announcements

**ASS:** In assemblies

P	NGT	GT	NTS	V	PA	ANN	ASS
Pupils	Non Gaelic Teachers	Gaelic Teachers	Non Teaching Staff	Visitors	Parents	Announce- ments	Assembly



The comparative graph shows more clearly the pupil perceptions of use of Gaelic outwith the classroom. The middle categories (regularly and quite often) have been combined to represent a middle view (sometimes). In this graph it can be seen that the frequency of

hearing Gaelic being 'Very Often' used in the school environment is very low. It is obvious that the persons using Gaelic most often outwith the classroom are Gaelic teachers.

Sometimes there are gender differences (Appendix B, Q21) evident in the data. The sample size is too small to draw firm conclusions but there are possible explanations for the differences for example girls may be more likely to be aware of the presence of visitors as at break times they are more likely to be within the building. They are also more likely to be introduced to visitors as they are more involved in the performing arts and are present at functions involving the public to a greater extent than boys are.

It is of interest that the pupils noted the prevalence of Gaelic among non teaching staff. The combined, very often and quite often results giving a figure of sixty percent. I have later elaborated on this point in the discussion of educationalists views on ethos, noting that in the Gaelic-medium school in Glasgow and effort is made to ensure that all ancillary staff speak Gaelic. (See chapter 7)

## Question 22

**Outwith school, which of the following activities do you take part in?**

**Regularly   Sometimes   Rarely   Never**

**a Conversation with friends**

**b Conversation with parents/guardians**

**c Conversation with brothers, sisters**

**d Reading books, magazines, newspapers**

**e Listening to Gaelic Radio**

**f Watching TV Programmes**

**g Using Gaelic in working with adults e.g. croft work, babysitting**

**h Prayer or participating in Gaelic Church services**

### **‘Regularly’ responses**

The dominant pattern of selection for this category was (b) (Conversation with Parents.) selected by 40%. Second was ‘h’, using Gaelic at ‘Church Services.’, selected by 25%. This was not surprising as the home and church are likely to be strong domains of Gaelic use in the community setting.

### **‘Sometimes’ Responses**

The ‘Sometimes’ chart indicates that talking to parents is still strong but not as strong as ‘Watching TV’ which was chosen by 38% and ‘Using Gaelic in Work Situations’, chosen by 38%. Again it is clear that the least favoured option is ‘a’ which suggests that pupils tend not to use Gaelic when talking to friends.

### **‘Rarely’ Responses**

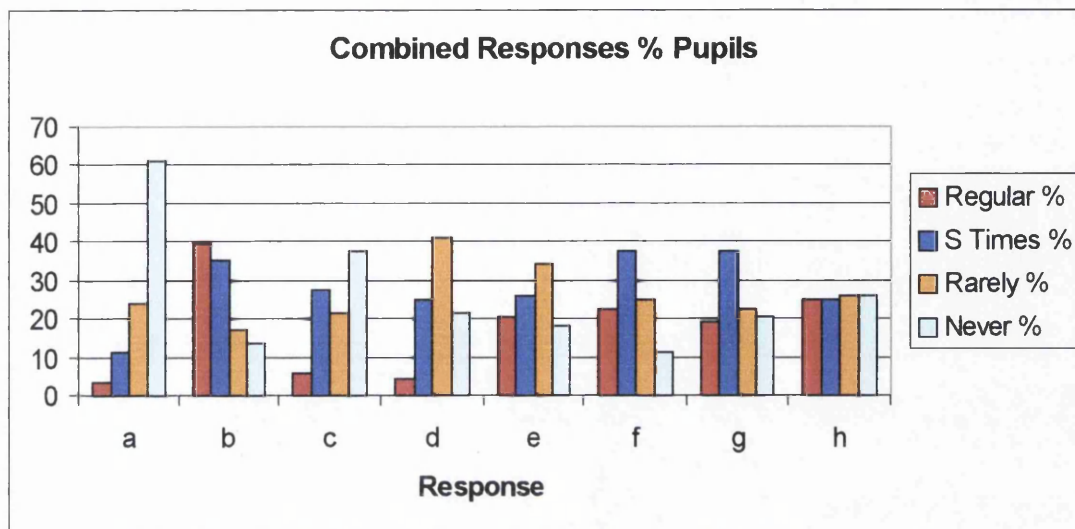
Reading Gaelic ‘Rarely’, 41% and listening to Gaelic on the radio, 34% feature as the most frequently selected in this category. This perhaps indicates that pupils of this age group are not interested in Gaelic outwith their classroom use of it but it could also indicate a gap which could be filled by providing better Gaelic texts for recreational reading and improving the delivery of radio programmes to this age group either by increasing the

quantity or by better publicity. Pupil satisfaction with the input for their age group was later discussed in the interviews.

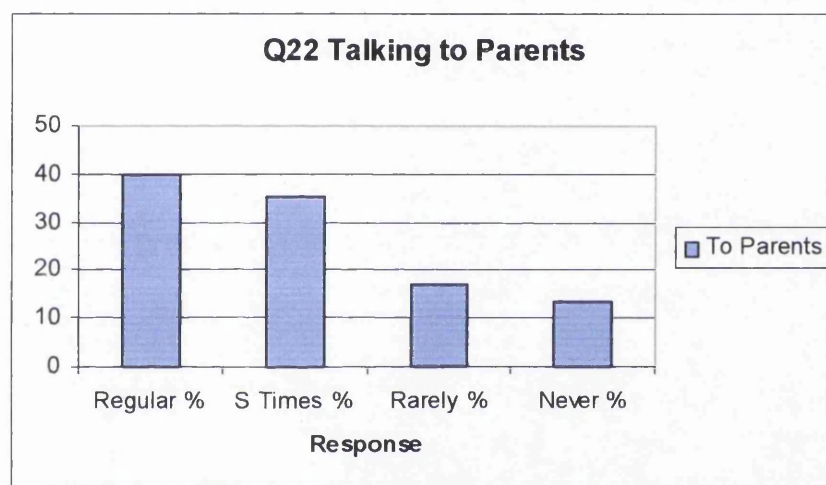
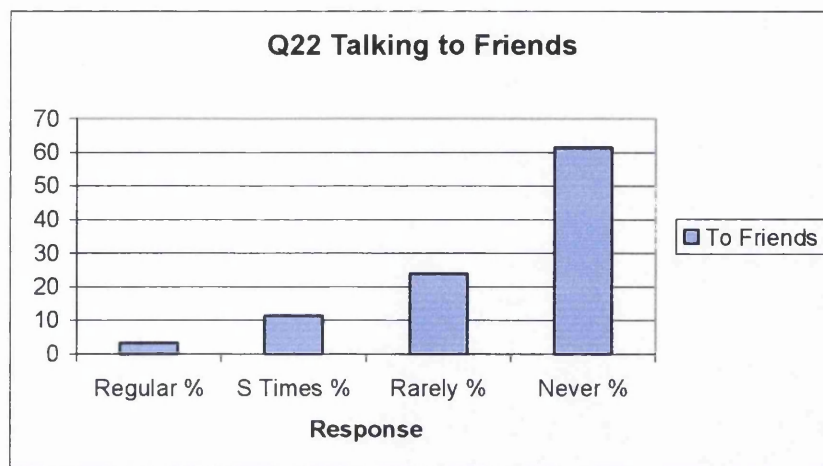
### **‘Never’ Responses**

The most striking aspect of this graph is that more than 60% of these pupils never speak Gaelic to their friends. About one in five ‘Never’ listen to Gaelic Radio or TV. About one quarter recorded that they would never use Gaelic in work situations or in church services. In terms of response by school the Uist pupils recorded the highest incidence of ‘Never’ responses in every area except in ‘e’, (listening to Gaelic radio) and ‘g’, (using Gaelic for work situations).





The combined responses graph gives an indication of the global spectrum of responses and yields at a glance important information about patterns of talking. Of particular interest is the frequency of use of Gaelic to friends and parents, represented in the following graphs.



These graphs, 'Frequency of Talking to Friends' and 'Frequency of Talking to Parents' show the contrast between the frequency with which pupils use Gaelic in speaking to friends and the frequency of use in speaking to parents.

**Question 23**

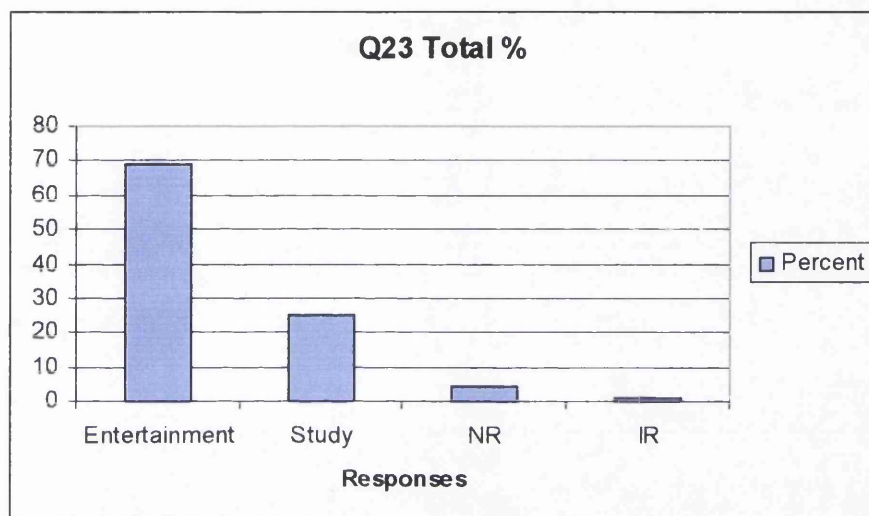
**Do you find Gaelic TV/Radio programmes are useful mainly for**

**a Entertainment**

**b Study**

**NR = No Response**

**IR = Invalid Response**



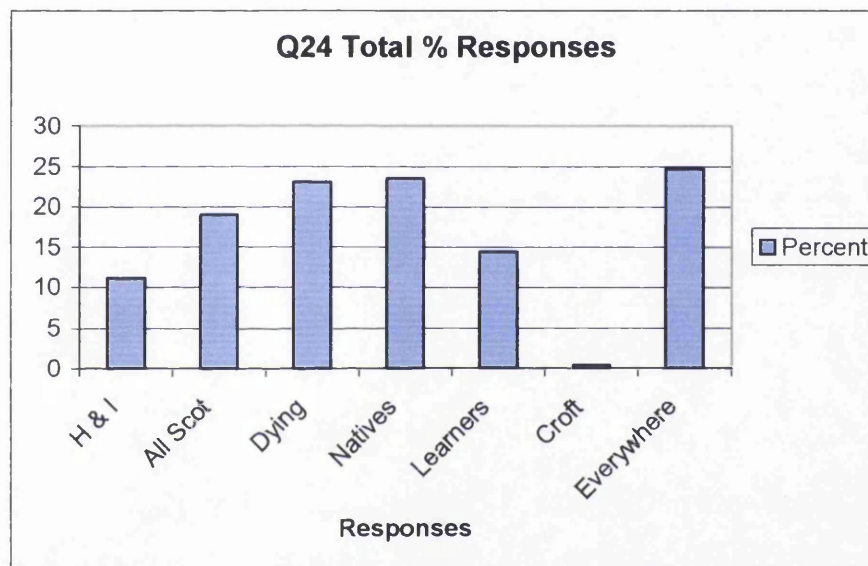
In the sample 69% of the pupils selected option (a) 'entertainment' and 25% chose (b) 'study'.

The subject of the role of the media was considered in Chapters 5 and 6 in the discussions with pupils and in the questionnaire sent to parents to give an added dimension of response to this question. A further breakdown of information can be seen in Appendix B, Q23.

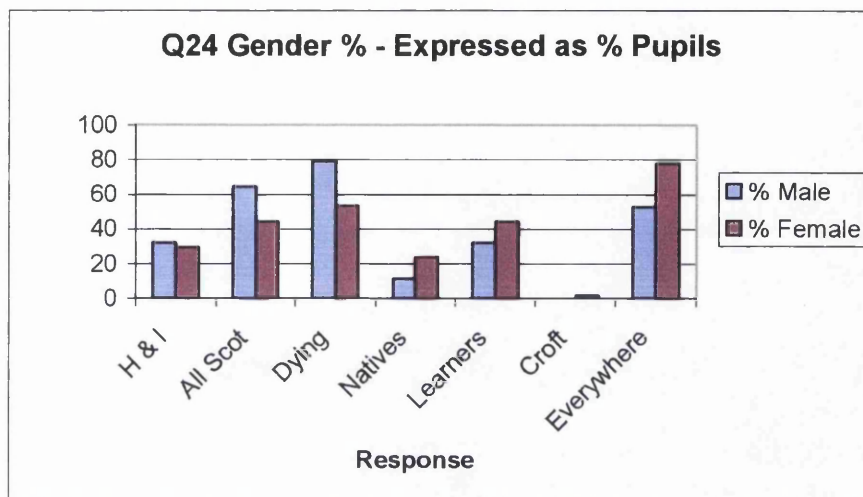
### Question 24

Here are some comments about Gaelic. Tick the box next to the statement or statements that are closest to your own viewpoint.

- a Gaelic is a language for the Highlands and Islands
- b Gaelic is a language for the whole of Scotland
- c Gaelic is a language that is dying out
- d Many more natives are speaking Gaelic than before
- e Gaelic is a language that people in Scotland want to learn
- f Gaelic is only useful as a language for the croft
- g Gaelic could be used in all aspects of life: work, business, pleasure



Surprisingly few of the respondents thought that Gaelic is only for the croft. 11% thought that Gaelic was only a Highlands and Islands language. Some of the responses are very positive. Almost 20% thought that Gaelic was a language for the whole of Scotland. This is quite a high proportion and suggests that there is some identity referencing between having Gaelic and being Scottish. There were also fairly positive signals about Gaelic seen in the responses to (d), (e), and (g) showing that pupils think that Gaelic is of more interest to more people and that people want to learn Gaelic in a wider variety of situations other than the crofting scenario. On the other hand a fairly high proportion, 23% thought that Gaelic was a dying language.



In studying the graph of responses by gender the breakdown is as follows. 30% of pupils see Gaelic as a language for the Highlands and Islands. 65% of males and 44% of females see Gaelic as a language for the whole of Scotland. 79% of males think that Gaelic is a dying language and 54% of females also selected that option.

Although many see it as a language that is dying out, some think that many more natives are speaking Gaelic than before, 12% of Male and 24% female respondents. 32% of males believed that Gaelic was a language that people wanted to learn and 44% of females chose this option. Only a one pupil thought that Gaelic was only for the croft. There were 53% of males and 78% of females who thought that Gaelic could be used in all aspects of life.

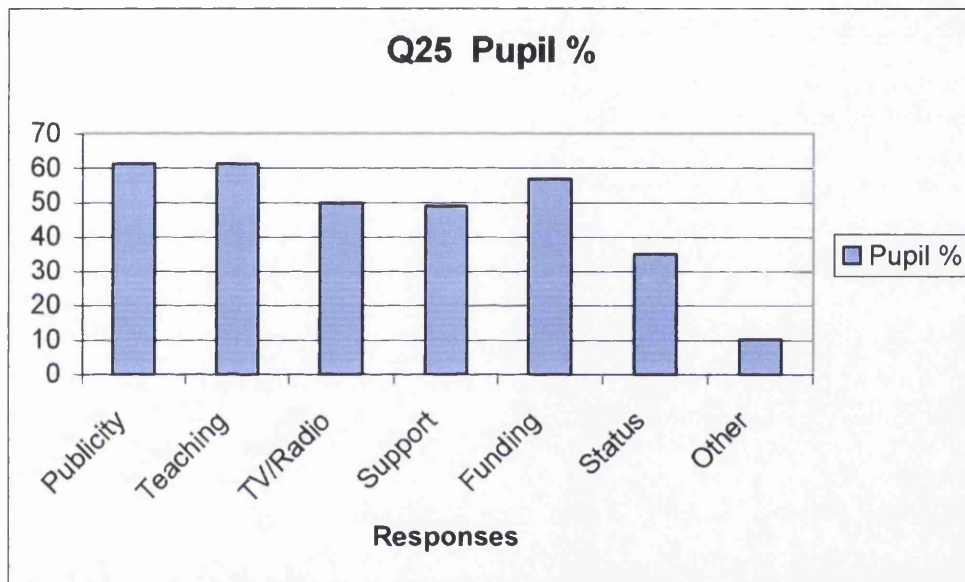
There may be a suggestion in the gender responses that females have a more optimistic view of the viability of Gaelic as fewer of them think it is a dying language and more of them believe that it is a language that people in Scotland want to learn.



### Question 25

If Gaelic is to survive which of the following would help?

- a Giving more publicity to Gaelic
- b Having more Gaelic taught in schools
- c More T/V and Radio
- d Giving more support to parents of pupils in Gaelic Medium
- e More Government funding
- f By having official language status for Gaelic
- g Other ways



In this question the responses show a fairly even balance across the spectrum of options. Options (a), (b) and (e) are very similar in distribution but what is of interest is that so many pupils, more than 60% thought that having more Gaelic teachers was important to the survival of Gaelic. Pupils also thought that funding for Gaelic was important and ranked this almost as high as having more publicity.

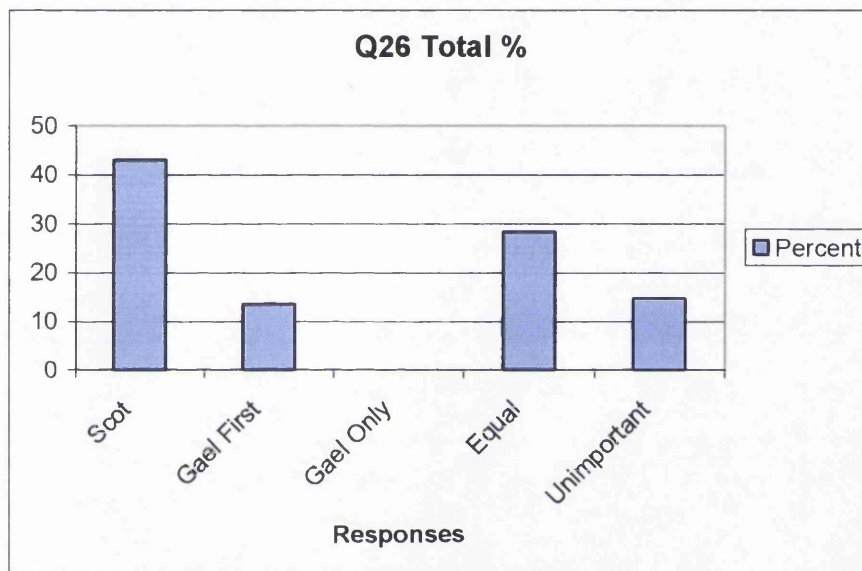
49% of pupils thought that parents of pupils in Gaelic medium should get more support. (Parents also expressed this view in the responses they made to the parent questionnaire and this was addressed in Chapter 6.)

35% thought that Gaelic should have official language status. Although this is lower than other options it represents a reasonable proportion considering that the topic may not have been aired in schools. 42% of the Lewis pupils selected this option 'a' and 26% of the Uist pupils. Around 10% of the sample thought that there might be other ways of helping Gaelic to survive. The consensus is that all the positive suggestions for the survival of Gaelic were supported by the pupils.

## Question 26

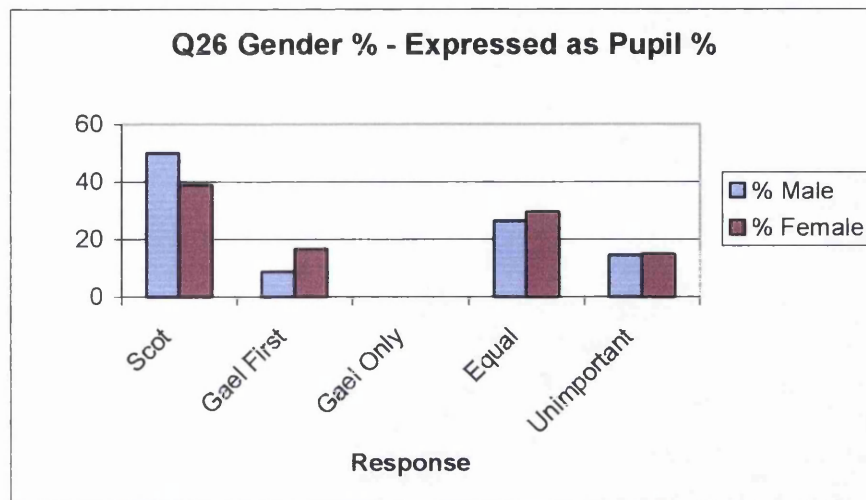
Which of the following best describes the way you see yourself?

- a As a Scot
- b As a Gael and then a Scot
- c As a Gael only
- d My Scottish and Gaelic identities are of equal value to me.
- e I do not see identity as being important



This question revealed that none of the pupils in the survey perceived themselves to be only a Gael in terms of their identity. Almost 15% however saw themselves as a Gael first of all but their identity referencing was predominantly as being Scots, with 43% selecting this option. However, almost 30% regarded themselves as valuing their Gaelic and Scottish identities equally.



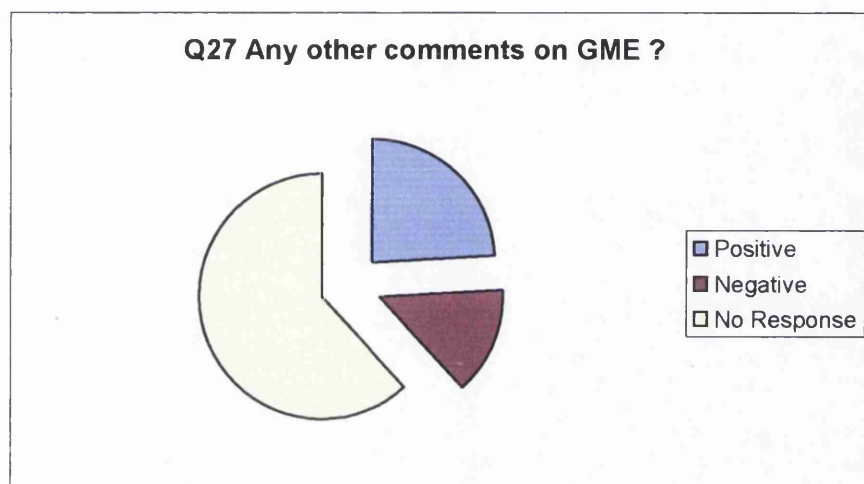


In this question the responses broken down by gender indicate that 50% of Male pupils see themselves primarily as Scots and 39% of females. This is much greater than the amount who see themselves as Gaels first and then Scots, 9% of males and 17% of females. No one in the group saw themselves as a Gael only. Of those who said they have dual Gaelic and Scottish identities, slightly more were female. This is in keeping with the suggestion in the previous question that females had a slightly more optimistic view of Gaelic in general.

The slight gender difference in option (a) in the results by gender where a higher proportion of males saw themselves primarily as Scots could be explained by the gender bias surrounding such aspects of Scottish life as football supporting.

## Question 27

Finally do you have any further comments to make on your experience of Gaelic-medium education?



The graph indicates a generally positive response of those who replied by about two to one to the experience of Gaelic-medium education. The graph has been calculated from a distillation of the comments of the cohort and is therefore impressionistic. The question threw up some interesting areas which merited further discussion in the course of the pupil interviews. It was interesting to note that pupils were prepared to comment on the stressful experience with respect to Gaelic education of the transition to secondary. There were very positive comments suggesting that they had benefited from the primary experience and had no regrets. Another positive outcome was that pupils mentioned the career and cultural benefits, without prompting. For example what could be more positive in outlook than the following, '*Endless opportunities in life, work, friends, leisure.*'

A pupil noted '*You were a different species in Gaelic-medium until primary six.*' Pupils also felt that there should be more learning support. One commented that there should be less homework, and only two thought that Gaelic was a waste of time. In general the comments are not critical of the experience and even the negative comments are in a sense pointing out some of the known limitations and deficiencies of Gaelic-medium education. The summary of written responses can be seen in Appendix B, Q27.

Below I have provided a brief summary of the pupil questionnaire information, expressed as key points that emerged from the sections of the questionnaire.

### ***Summary of Questionnaire Information***

#### ***Home Experience of Gaelic Q1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10***

All except one had at least one parent fluent in Gaelic.

80% spoke Gaelic before going to school

A majority reported using English as their main language in school and at home although parental preference was for Gaelic at home. 75% reported a change in their use of Gaelic as they have grown older for reasons to do with English becoming the dominant school language.

#### ***Primary School Experience Q3, 4, 5***

A majority remember English being introduced in Primary 3

A majority felt that by the end of primary they were equally competent in Gaelic and English

In comparing the elements of reading, writing, talking, the pupils felt that they were stronger in English for each element at the time of being interviewed.

### ***Secondary School Experience of Gaelic Q11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17***

Pupils reported an improvement in the amount of practice in the elements of speaking reading and writing.

They are generally happy with their choice of Gaelic. They chose to continue with Gaelic because of scoring high marks.

They reported many positive aspects about their experience of studying Gaelic but some disliked homework.

### ***Benefits of Studying Gaelic Q 18, 19, 20***

Pupils identified the assessable components of Gaelic as being important; namely, spelling grammar vocabulary. They were more confident in using language in formal settings.

Gaelic made them feel more Scottish

They recognised that Gaelic would provide job prospects

Gaelic had important cultural spin offs.

### ***Gaelic in the Wider Community Q21, 22, 23, 24,25, 26, 27***

Pupils reported that Gaelic in their schools was not used outwith the classroom in any official way and that they did not speak it to other non native pupils

A majority saw Gaelic as a language for Scotland and for the Highlands.

Pupils suggested that if Gaelic is to survive there should be more publicity for the language, it should be more prominent in the media and that more funding should be spent on teaching.

They enjoyed TV and Radio programmes but saw them as being more for entertainment than having an educational value.

## Chapter 5 – Pupil Interviews

### *Introduction*

The pupil interviews were conducted over a period of six months in the four secondary schools in my sample. This was achieved with the co-operation of the Head Teachers and the Gaelic Departmental Heads. I was fortunate that the national schools' Gaelic debate, which takes place annually, had proved to be a good networking arena for me to make contact with the Gaelic teachers of the region and to meet some pupils. I had also met some of the pupils previously at the regional schools' Gaelic quiz and at local *fèisean* and the National Mod.

At each school, I arranged to meet with pupils in a room set aside for interviewing and explained to the pupils that the purpose of my interview was to give me more information for my academic study and was not in any way a test for them. I also assured them that I would conduct the interviews in English and not in Gaelic. Although they would have coped in Gaelic, I felt that they might feel some element of being assessed in their Gaelic skills. I reminded them of the survey they had taken part in, and allowed them to look again at the questionnaire. I then spent a short time, where relevant, telling them something about my interest in Gaelic education. Although their teachers had already selected the pupils, I checked that they were happy to proceed.

I felt that rather than sticking to a list of pre-planned questions, I would gain more information by basing the interviews around the general themes that had emerged from the responses to the pupil questionnaire. This enabled me to cover a range of issues and to follow an interesting line of discussion without being too prescriptive. It also had the advantage of allowing the pupils to take the initiative and volunteer their own views more freely.

The interview format followed the general pattern of covering the major themes that had emerged from the pupil questionnaire. These were:

- Experience of GME in Primary

- Transition to Secondary
- Gaelic-medium in other subjects
- Awareness of opportunities
- Awareness of culture and identity issues
- Views on the current position of Gaelic, and on Gaelic media

### ***Experience of GME in Primary***

The pupils generally remembered primary school as a supportive environment, and in some cases they were not aware of being a separate group. This was more likely to be the case in small rural schools. In larger primary schools where the introduction of Gaelic-medium was a recent innovation, they found the experience difficult at first.

Crucial to the experience was the extent of acceptance of Gaelic in the culture of the school. Pupils who were in the very first cohort in areas where Gaelic had declined, described their first experiences as difficult, whereas others who entered a setting which was more naturally Gaelic had an easier transition and were not aware of problems. The following extract reveals the anxiety felt by one pupil who started Gaelic-medium in a school where it was not yet embedded.

*I was crying a lot at first. We were told, even in the playground to speak Gaelic, and I used to get called every name under the sun, trying to speak in Gaelic to everyone who walked past me.*

Some pupils spoke about the sense of being apart from the mainstream and pupils were aware of the difficulties teachers had in keeping the Gaelic ethos in a situation where there were very few Gaelic speakers. One respondent from Uist, for example, had clear memories of her confused experiences of doing English in a Gaelic Unit in Primary one:

*When I first went to school I was not able to speak English, but primary one was in English and Gaelic. It was so dominated by ones that could only speak English. For example, the teacher had to do the Maths in English at first.*

The same pupil remembered that as pupils in a Gaelic Unit, they were actively discouraged from mixing with the mainstream group.

*The Gaelic class were not supposed to be friends with the English class.*

Other pupils seemed to be in situations where the implementation had taken place earlier and Gaelic-medium was more embedded. As one Harris pupil said,

*It was all right. We could all speak Gaelic. The work was easy.*

And a Lewis pupil concurred,

*There were always teachers who could speak Gaelic to you.*

It is important to stress that the experience of primary depended on where the pupil went to school. Those who lived outwith the larger townships and attended small primary schools had a better chance of experiencing full immersion without concessions being made to lack of fluency of the intake. There were some schools in the early days that may have been overzealous in this respect. Schools have been known to hold a Gaelic-medium Christmas party with a separate Santa Claus distributing gifts in Gaelic. Although a politically correct move, this duplication would have caused some slight confusion to children. The *Home and Community* report, which looked at the dynamic between home and school in the lives of Gaelic-medium children in Scotland, suggested that:

More needs to be done to break down the artificial barrier between the English-medium and Gaelic-medium streams, for example, English-medium classes learning Gaelic as a second language, joint projects on Gaelic history, culture and place names.<sup>135</sup>

The experience of pupils in rural parts of Uist was quite different from the larger primary schools in Uist and Barra. One rural pupil, for example, had no real understanding of

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<sup>135</sup> Stradling R, and MacNeil M, *Home and Community: Their Role in Enhancing the Gaelic Language Competencies of Children in Gaelic-medium Education*, 2000: 4



having been in a different form of education than others. Although she had a father who was non-Gaelic speaking and could therefore speak English before she went to school, she felt that there was no tension between the English and Gaelic groups.

*My father was not a Gaelic speaker so I knew English. But we taught the ones who had less Gaelic. Everybody could speak both in my school.*

### **Transition to Secondary**

In the transition to secondary school, pupils described some of the differences they experienced in moving from a Gaelic-medium educational environment to an English one. There was a general feeling that the aims were different and that the focus had changed from being fluent in general terms, to the more specific demands of writing skills being developed. Greater demands were made of them in terms of linguistic accuracy. More time was spent on writing and correcting spelling and grammatical errors. As one pupil put it,

*I myself found it very difficult and I didn't like it at all. At the start I thought this is going to be an absolute nightmare for me.*

They also expressed fears that they would be behind in other subjects, which had previously been delivered in Gaelic, particularly Mathematics. Pupils mentioned the small amount of time given to their Gaelic curriculum and this, coupled with the sheer weight of numbers of non-Gaelic speaking pupils, created a culture shock which made transition difficult. Some did however point to some positive benefits, namely their ability to master other languages because of the Gaelic-medium experience.

*We don't do French now but it was easy [in S1 and S2].*

Those who moved to a small two-year secondary from primary found that this had provided a good bridge between Gaelic-medium and the full mainstream experience. This was expressed by two pupils from Lewis who clearly found that there were cultural and linguistic differences in the transition in S3.

*There was a jump in difficulty after first and second year. It was hard as not so many people speak Gaelic.*

There is no doubt that the transition to secondary is in itself daunting for some pupils, and for those who have been in a Gaelic-medium setting, especially in smaller schools, it can be a culture shock. Add to this the brisker pace of learning, a more competitive environment and the emphasis on correct writing and grammar in the native Gaelic class, and there is probably every justification for one child describing the transition as ‘a nightmare.’

In a study which focussed on the experiences of year 2 and year 4 of secondary pupils, the same issue emerged:

A small proportion of young people raised learning issues associated with moving to a more English dominated timetable, and though expressed by a small proportion only, it highlights the wisdom of close monitoring through secondary.<sup>136</sup>

The group interviews also threw up some interesting comment on how pupils viewed the cultural differences between themselves and other pupils. Few pupils mentioned any overt stigmatising because of Gaelic but they did experience a loss of confidence in using Gaelic in secondary school outwith the classroom. There seemed to be an implicit recognition that the contexts for use of Gaelic must become more restricted in secondary. In other words they had discovered that there was an unsupportive social ambience: a scenario highlighted also in the *Emergent Identities* report.<sup>137</sup>

MacNeil and Stradling made some recommendations in their report to address the issues minimising the possible cultural dissonance between Gaelic and non-Gaelic pupils. These included highlighting more clearly the aims of Gaelic-medium education and supporting pupils through the transition stages from primary Gaelic-medium to secondary.

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<sup>136</sup> MacNeil M, and Stradling R, *Emergent Identities and Bilingual Education*, 1999-2000: ii

Schools should also provide more Gaelic learning opportunities for pupils and staff and ensure that the positive value of Gaelic is enshrined in policy statements.<sup>138</sup>

The pupils in my group interviews did not describe the disparities as being insurmountable but there was awareness that Gaelic-medium pupils were very much in the minority. One boy from Lewis described the cultural disparity in this way:

*You didn't really have to disguise the fact that you spoke it but there were just fewer people to speak Gaelic to.*

The fact that the pupil used the word 'disguise' suggested to me that there was perhaps an issue here of pupils sloughing off their Gaelic identity in order to merge with the dominant group.

This absence of a Gaelic ethos outwith the classroom, already vividly shown up in responses to the Questionnaire survey (see Chapter 4, Q21) was also remarked on by the pupils that I interviewed, but they did not feel that they should be asserting the language difference. There was a growing awareness of the influence of the home and the extended family in terms of providing contexts for Gaelic use and support for maintaining language practice. A pupil from Harris felt that although their Gaelic had been affected by secondary, this had been offset by input from the family.

*Our Gaelic went back a bit but it has come back again. My grandparents and parents compensated at home.*

This compensatory reinforcement from family was an experience already noted by several Phase 1 respondents (see Chapter 4, Q8 & Q22).

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<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

## ***GME in Other Subjects***

The pupils were not too concerned about the lack of opportunities to do other subjects in the medium of Gaelic at the secondary level. This may have been because they were not fully at the stage of challenging norms. Also, in terms of their developmental stage it was more likely that they would want to conform to the mores of the dominant language and culture and integrate rather than be seen as a separate group. When asked if they would have done better if their whole school experience had been Gaelic, one pupil summed up the general feeling on that issue:

*You can still do some subjects in Gaelic in the two-year secondary schools.*

Another pupil had a telling insight into one of the fundamental parental fears surrounding the study of secondary subjects through the medium of Gaelic.

*You can do some subjects but parents don't want you to do certain subjects such as Maths or Science.*

This issue is further discussed in Chapter 6.

## ***Opportunities***

As an interviewer I found it surprising that despite the historical lack of parental confidence in Gaelic-medium and the reservations expressed by some parents, the pupils I interviewed in groups came out very positively in favour of their language and the opportunities that it had already offered, and would continue to present to them. There were several very positive responses to my questions about the role of Gaelic outwith school, including:

*We've been on the Gaelic children's programme 'Dè a Nis?'.*

*It might be handy if you know what you want to do and the job requires Gaelic.*

And from a boy who had had acting experience in a Gaelic film:

*It is a boost. I might want to do something in drama or be an actor or something.*

This positive attitude to their future prospects of a career in Gaelic was summed up poignantly by one of the girls:

*I don't know what I would do if I didn't have Gaelic. Well, I don't mean I would die. I mean career wise I know I will get a job with it. I expect to make my career through it.*

## **Culture and Identity**

On the issue of how Gaelic impacts on their sense of identity and culture the responses indicated a sense of pride in being a native.

*If you go to a Mod and you see 'native speaker' on the song sheet, you feel above the rest because you are able to do it. You just feel better about yourself because you think, well, I'm a native speaker. I can sing Gaelic. I can do everything. It is good that we get taught Gaelic in school because it is your culture and I think you should know it.*

A girl from the Lewis group expressed a strong awareness of the sense of cultural pluralism that Gaelic medium education had given to her.

*It gives me two ways of looking at things because I am aware of two cultures, English and Gaelic.*

Pupils also mentioned the value of having an extra language and pointed to the influence that Gaelic had had in improving their English. There was also some use of Gaelic as a

'secret' language when they were on school trips, which made them realise something of the distinctive cultural difference between themselves and people on the mainland. Their perception was, however, that the world outwith the islands was an English speaking domain, much like their secondary schools were. Although they could see the value of passing on Gaelic to the next generation of children, they felt that promoting a Gaelic culture within a school was not the done thing. When asked how they could promote a Gaelic ethos in their schools, this response showed an unwillingness to be identified with active promotion:

*I think the more you promote it, the less people would want it. You wouldn't want to promote it at our age.*

Active involvement with cultural markers of Gaelic was seen as a generational thing: as one pupil said of promoting a Gaelic culture:

*It is probably something your parents or your grandparents do.*

In one of the groups a pupil mentioned that an anxiety about loss of identity comes when pupils leave home as she had brothers away from home who spoke Gaelic every time they phoned, in her view so that they would not lose the language. Another pupil was certain that Gaelic-medium had strengthened the sense of having a distinctive island identity:

*I was very pleased and proud to get to speak Gaelic. It does give a feeling of belonging to Uist. You know, like Highland and Scottish but this is more Outer Hebrides-ish.*

Another pupil from the same group endorsed this sentiment:

*I definitely feel that Scotland is unique because England has only one language. Gaelic is like a way of recognising people.*

In terms of their sense of national identity, one group thought that having Gaelic made them more Scottish. This had been revealed in the questionnaire survey (Chapter 4, Q26)

which showed that more than 40% saw themselves as Scottish. Interviewees saw themselves as just Scottish and were not comfortable with the term 'Gael', preferring to ascribe their identity allegiance to their island rather than to the less familiar concept of a generalised Gaelic speaker from the Gàidhealtachd.

A recent study into the identity referencing of Scottish students concluded that:

Language occupies a mediocre or low place in the identity profile ratings.<sup>139</sup>

The author of this study, Margaret Nicolson, assumes that this is because the students in her sample have no need to feel strongly about it at their stage in life:

They do not reflect upon it in a conscious way or they have no necessity in their living or working contexts to make it an emblem of who they are.<sup>140</sup>

This is perhaps the same feeling that the students in my sample had. While being conscious of cultural differences, they feel no need to identify themselves primarily as Gaels.

### ***Current Position of Gaelic, and the Gaelic Media***

The pupils in my study had a sense of inevitability about the demise of Gaelic. In their school situation they could not see a role for the language outwith classroom use as a subject. When asked about the possibility of widening the use of Gaelic to the general school population, for example by having announcements in Gaelic they were sceptical:

*What if the others don't want it though?*

There was a feeling that to do something that was not for the majority would be bad manners and would be a breach of some sort of unspoken linguistic code of practice that may threaten the English speakers.

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<sup>139</sup> Nicolson M, 'Language and Who We Are: Some Scottish Student Perspectives', *Scottish Educational Review*. 2003: vol. 35, no. 2, 131.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

*It would be like having announcements in French. You only learn enough of that in first and second year to know your name and address. To understand announcements in Gaelic you would have to be a native.*

On the subject of their future use of Gaelic they were pessimistic.

*When you come to secondary you realise that not everybody speaks Gaelic.*

It is interesting to note that this absence of a Gaelic ethos which creates a desire to conform to the language of the mainstream was noted in the recent study of Hebridean teenagers by Morag MacNeil and Bob Stradling:

The Gaelic-medium experience at secondary level was not supported by the English ethos of the school as a whole. This is important to address (if only at the level of harm reduction) in terms of the messages the school is giving out, through its provision, emotional and physical, for the development of Gaelic-medium students.<sup>141</sup>

What became clear in the interviews was that the schools at secondary level had no clear agenda or intention to provide a Gaelic-medium setting for pupils who had been through the system in primary school. Indeed, the term 'Gaelic-medium' had dropped out of use completely in some secondary schools and pupils were designated only as 'fluent' or 'learners.' Provision occurred on the basis of availability of staffing and this could change at any time to the benefit or detriment of Gaelic. There has been no evaluation specific to the Western Isles of the work that has been done in secondary schools in the area of provision in discrete subjects.

As with the MacNeil study, the views of pupils interviewed in my study and their awareness of the current position of Gaelic, were also conditioned to some extent by their stage of adolescent development. Clearly, there were issues that they had not given much thought to. However, they sometimes made perceptive comments about the preservation of



the language, for example by the media, based on their views of what would be acceptable to their generation. One group who discussed the role of the media acknowledged the value that Gaelic programmes had in promoting the language for Gaelic speakers but they felt that there was a lack of vision in providing the kind of programmes that young people would want:

*They [the media] think we are babies. They try to copy the style of English programmes but it doesn't work.*

Another group favoured an approach which allowed young people to be directly involved in programme making. They felt that there should be more programmes to help people to learn.

The pupils considered preserving the language to be something that Gaelic speakers addressed later in life, perhaps as a feature of growing old. In their view, Gaelic was a school subject that had diminished in status from their primary experience but they saw this as a natural consequence of moving to an English environment in secondary. Their expectation was that in later life when they moved from the island, Gaelic would play a lesser role in their lives as it would not be used by them in their lives as students on the mainland. As far as use of the language on their islands was concerned, they agreed that within certain accepted contexts, i.e. with older people, they would continue to use it.

As an interviewer of a generation in which there was a tacit understanding that Gaelic was almost as dead as Latin, I expected that pupils would be far more critical of Gaelic especially as their educational path had been chosen by their parents. However, there were virtually no negative comments about their Gaelic-medium primary education and the ones they expressed were reflections of their parents' concerns, for example the fears of studying Sciences or Maths through the medium of Gaelic. One pupil summed up the overall confidence that GME does not impede achievement in English:

*You learn English anyway.*

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<sup>141</sup> MacNeil, M. and Stradling, B, *Emergent Identities and Bilingual Education*, Lèirsinn, 1999-2000, ii.

I had envisaged that their feelings of embarrassment at the separateness conferred by Gaelic would be much stronger. They did not express this view very strongly when I broached the subject and were more inclined to think that it was just impolite to speak Gaelic in front of people who did not understand it. They made positive comments such as,

*We don't know yet what Gaelic has done for us. It certainly did not hold me back.*

This kind of certainty is in direct contrast to the attitudes which typified the previous generations, those of these pupils' parents and grandparents.

Although some pupils expressed awareness that their use of language was only acceptable in a restricted environment during their school days, they also expressed optimism about the future, beyond school and university, focusing perhaps on a time when they could escape from the adolescent taboos.

*We are aware that it is dying out. I would feel that I had to pass it on. You might think it is dying out but when we get older we will go back to it.*

## **Chapter 5 Summary**

The data from Chapter 5 of this research also show many positive attitudes and experiences which I have summarised as follows:

- In GM primary pupils felt special
- Fluency in Gaelic has helped them in studying other languages
- Gaelic led to cultural and career opportunities
- Pupils had positive attitudes to the study of literature
- Pupils had an awareness of the duality of cultural identity endowed by Gaelic

On the negative side their responses show that their experience could be improved at secondary level:

- Gaelic is relegated to status of an ordinary subject
- There is pressure to abandon Gaelic outwith the domain of the classroom
- They are aware in secondary that they are a minority
- They feel powerless to save Gaelic

Leaving aside the difficulties experienced by teenagers in finding a way to identify with their culture without overstepping an unstated language etiquette it is interesting to note that their overall perception of their Gaelic experience in secondary is positive. They are happy with their choice of Gaelic as a subject and see it as a viable curricular choice.

## Chapter 6 – Parent Questionnaire

### *Introduction*

The survey of parents was conducted under the same conditions for all four schools. Gaelic teachers in the participating schools were sent copies of the questionnaire together with explanatory letters and stamped addressed envelopes. The questionnaires were circulated to Gaelic classes that had participated in phase 1. Pupils were asked to take the questionnaire home to parents and the parents were asked to post the completed questionnaire to me at my home address. In this way the schools themselves were distanced from the exercise.

There were twenty seven responses: three from Barra, four from Harris, twelve from Lewis and eight from Uist. The collated results represent the views of a small but significant group of households.

Parents responded in some detail even when only ‘yes’ or ‘no’ options were suggested by the question.

The responses were collated to give a general impression of what was being said and then broken down into their constituent themes and categorised on Excel spreadsheets. The charts show the results of this categorisation and offer a snapshot of parental views. I have also quoted some of the comments, given in full in Appendix D.

The main impression from the responses is that parents have a high regard for Gaelic-medium education, seeing it as beneficial in providing a good education and other wider cultural and career opportunities. This is clearly shown in some of the charts. Where a few parents were expressing reservations these seemed to be in the area of lack of support for parents who were themselves learners, who thought that more support could be offered.

Very few responses indicated total dissatisfaction. The breakdown of responses shows that parents on the whole chose Gaelic to help preserve fluency in the language and for sound

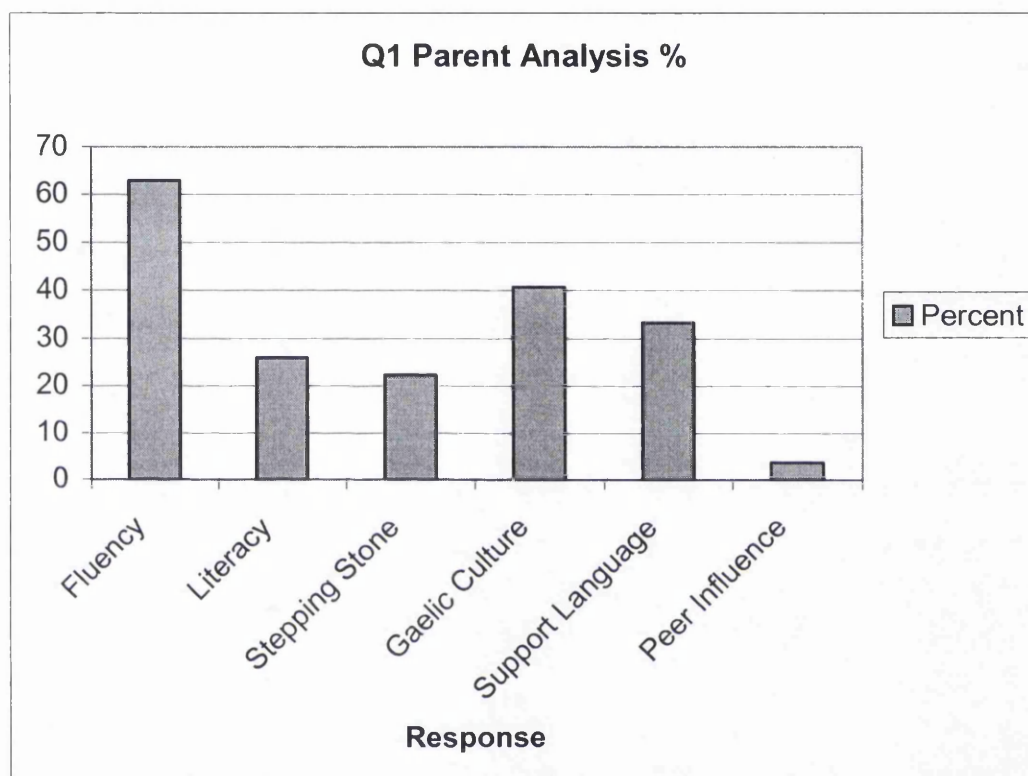
educational reasons. A close study of the charts and accompanying commentary in the following section will show the level of satisfaction in more detail.

In addition to the chart information I have drawn on the compilation of written comments of parents to give a broader perspective.

## Parent Questionnaire Analysis and Commentary

### Question 1

What were your reasons for choosing Gaelic-medium education?



The categories specified by parents in responding to this question include what I have called 'Stepping Stone.' I have used this term to cover any comment, which referred to future benefit in terms of career aspirations or other educational benefits. The heading 'Gaelic Culture' embraces any comment, which referred to culture or heritage. The category 'Support Language' was used to include any comment, which referred to language maintenance or preservation. The 'Peer Influence' category refers to influences from other parents.

It is clear that the over riding consideration for parents in selecting Gaelic-medium was 'Fluency'. In some cases the parents specified other considerations such as cultural/heritage issues or the fact that Gaelic would promote their overall education and be of use

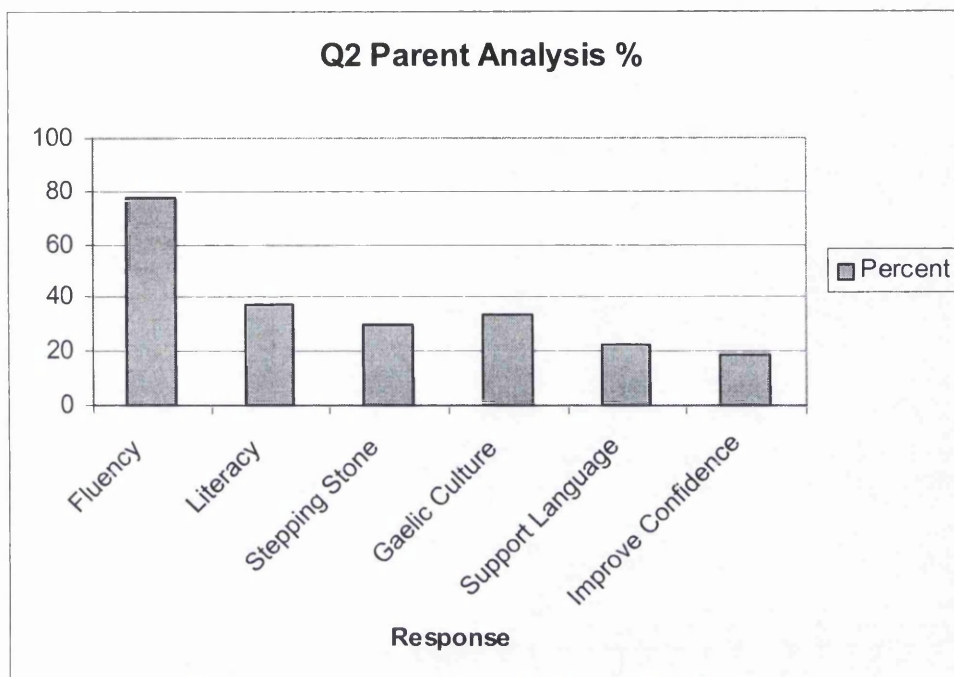
in future careers ('Stepping-Stone'). A few mentioned the influence of their own peers, i.e. other parents but it is interesting to note that this was not a great consideration. This suggests that perhaps in its early days Gaelic-medium was not being recommended by word of mouth. Next to fluency, parents seemed to be aware of the importance of Gaelic as part of their culture. They also believed that by choosing Gaelic they were supporting the language.

In relation to prioritising fluency parents said that they saw Gaelic as an extra language, the language of the home, their children's heritage. In some cases they linked fluency with what they perceived as a high standard of education. Some parents felt that the school would do the job of providing the fluency, and were clearly disappointed that this did not turn out to be the case, while others thought that they had the prime role and that the school would reinforce parents in promoting fluency in the language.

Some parents specifically mentioned literacy and where this has happened it has been quantified on the graph. In the questionnaires parents elaborated on this by saying for example that they wanted children to 'read, write and think' in Gaelic or that they wanted 'full' bilingualism.

## Question 2

What have been the benefits?



The areas identified by parents included the ones mentioned above in Q1 'reasons for choosing Gaelic-medium education' together with a new category that emerged, 'Improving Confidence.' Parents also mentioned the feeling of being part of a wider world of Gaelic culture and being in contact with the local culture.

The overwhelming body of opinion, 79% was that fluency had been a benefit, with learning about Gaelic culture coming a close third to literacy. Parents also thought that Gaelic gave other educational opportunities, i.e. 'Stepping Stone.' Some parents highlighted the role that Gaelic had played in improving their children's confidence.

Less frequent but still recurrent were issues of literacy, learning about Gaelic culture and educational opportunities, (stepping stone) mentioned by 30% to 39% of parents.

In their supportive comments about Gaelic culture and pride in their language parents made reference to the development of children's abilities in singing, participation in TV and radio programmes, pride in their language and culture. Another benefit identified

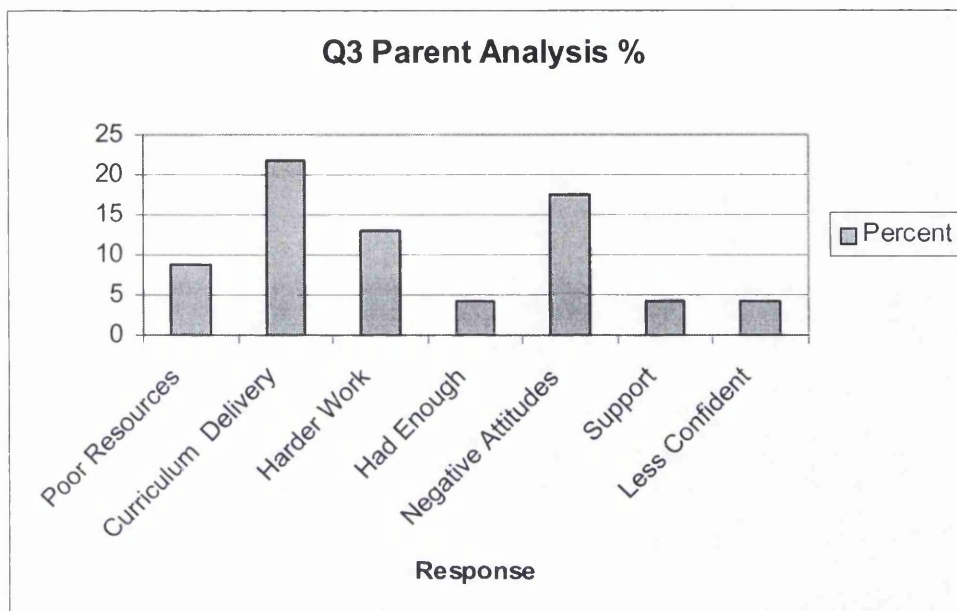


under literacy was the ability of children to become competent in English and in other modern languages because of their fluency in Gaelic.

The ability to write in Gaelic was mentioned by several parents and this was seen also as a benefit in being able to cope with the Gaelic curriculum in secondary school. One parent specifically referred to Gaelic-medium as providing 'an excellent general education.' On the basis of the range of positive comments made it can be inferred that parents see Gaelic-medium as providing a good range of educational opportunities. Parents are positive about the cultural benefits and the notion of supporting the Gaelic language.

### Question 3

Were there disadvantages?

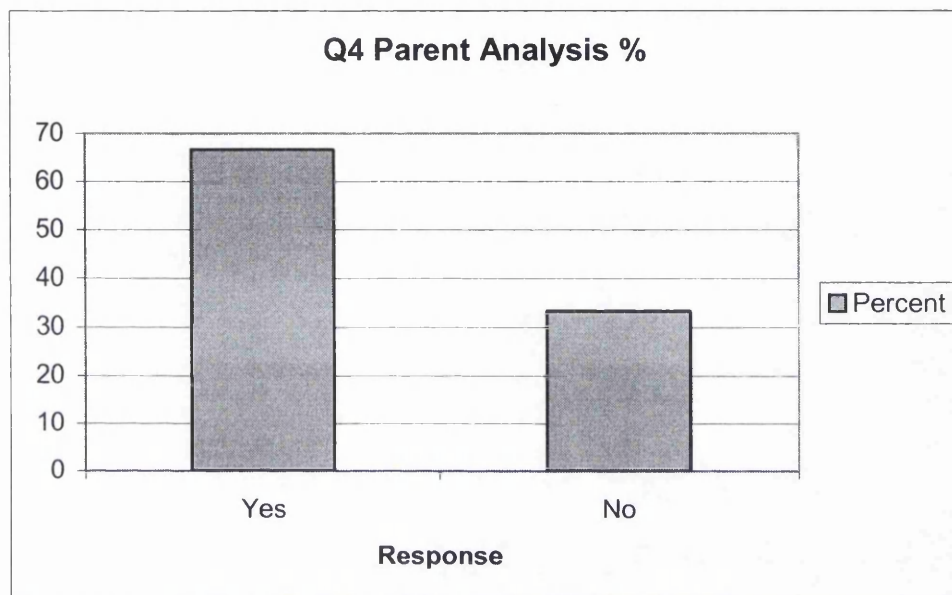


This question threw up a wide range of comments from some parents but all of the other parents said that there were no disadvantages. Where disadvantages are mentioned they provide interesting feedback on the Gaelic-medium perspective from a parental viewpoint. 'Poor Resources,' in the graph refers to the lack of materials specifically designed for Gaelic-medium but this was only mentioned by a small percentage. Parents also referred to difficulties that were experienced in the relatively new area of teaching other subjects, such as Mathematics, in the medium of Gaelic.

A few parents thought that their children would have to work harder to keep up with children in the mainstream, especially in the transition stages of speaking and reading English. One parent thought that by secondary the children had had enough of Gaelic. There were also parents who thought that there were difficulties caused by the negative attitudes held by others to Gaelic-medium. Another disadvantage mentioned was that children might begin to feel alienated from the rest of the school by being in an 'exclusive' group. One parent felt that Gaelic immersion could result in pupils feeling less confident in English but only one parent mentioned that lack of support put them at a disadvantage. However in a later question, Q5, when asked specifically about the support that was required, several parents offered constructive comments.

#### Question 4

**Do you support Gaelic-medium subjects in Secondary?**



This question yielded a 'Yes' or 'No' response with parents in some cases adding comments. In one case a parent pointed out that the option was not available. Positive comments included statements about the importance for Gaelic language status of teaching other subjects through the medium.

At the time of the research, the availability of Gaelic medium teaching in subjects other than Gaelic as a guaranteed permanent feature of the curriculum varied. In Lewis it was offered in social subjects and was embedded in the curriculum due to active encouragement by members of the Gaelic department, one of whom also taught History. In the other schools, History was offered but on the basis of demand and timetabling constraints which meant that it could be on the curriculum one year and off the next. At the time of my survey, session 2001/2002 there was little on offer outwith Lewis apart from the provision mentioned, although the Barra school was making every effort to improve provision.

There was no formal promotion of subject teaching in Gaelic by the authority and it is therefore encouraging that so many of the parents were supportive of an experimental initiative of which they had very little direct knowledge or models to reassure them. Given that there is little official promotion it is also not surprising that some parents remain sceptical about the prospect of extended GM teaching.

One parent expressed some reservations about discrete subjects in GM on the basis that the examinations in other subjects are not as yet available in Gaelic. Another parent felt that teaching subjects such as Maths would not be practical. A third parent also pointed out some of the perceived problems that could arise post-school:

*Subjects are more complex and it would be a disadvantage to be studying them in a language that you might not be using in college, university or working later on in life.*

It should be said that the fears about Mathematics should have been somewhat allayed by the publication of the Attainments report of Richard Johnstone:

The attainment of Gaelic-medium pupils in AAP (Assessment of Achievement Programme) tests of mathematics seem positive in that they (Gaelic-medium pupils) were above those of their English medium educated counterparts in the same schools; with both groups together being ahead of national AAP levels for all schools and small schools.<sup>142</sup>

It is interesting to note similar high achievement in North America, where Navajo Indian children in Arizona outperformed their monolingual English counterparts on fourth grade tests, scoring 'almost 10 percentage points higher in Maths.'<sup>143</sup>

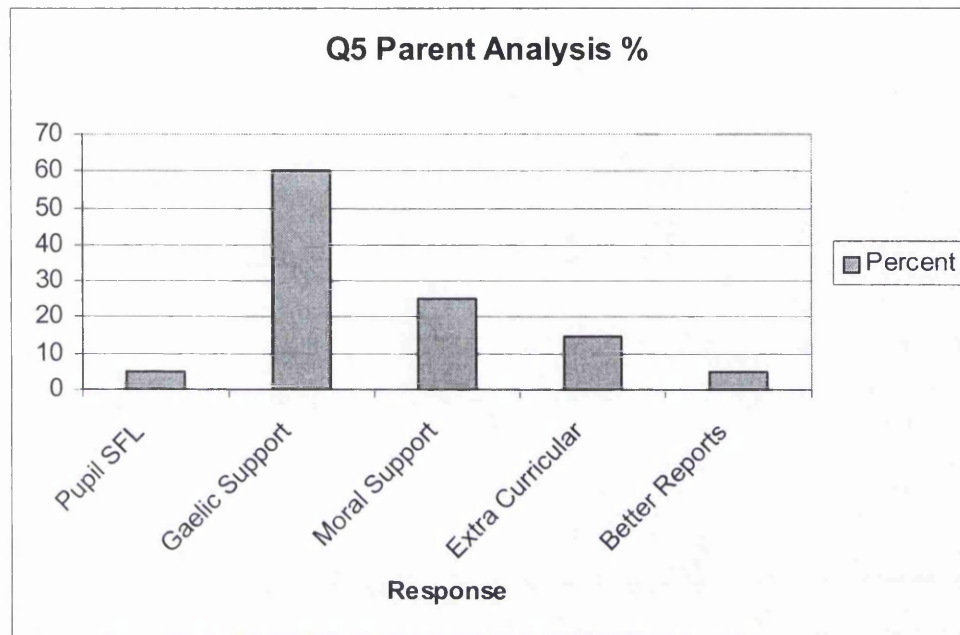
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<sup>142</sup> Johnstone R. *The Attainments of Pupils Receiving Gaelic-medium Primary Education in Scotland*, 1999: 69

<sup>143</sup> Arviso M and Holm W. 'A Navajo Immersion Programme in Fort Defiance Arizona', *The Green Book of Language Revitalisation in Practice*, 2001:208

## Question 5

**What further support do you consider important in assisting parents who have chosen Gaelic-medium education?**



The responses to this question indicated a strong desire on the part of parents to have support provided particularly for those parents with no Gaelic, or for households with only one Gaelic speaking parent. There was a strong feeling that children from such households might be at a disadvantage, and support for them and their parents in dealing with homework was a recurrent theme. Some suggestions were social events, language classes for parents after school and assistance for parents to enable them to help children with homework. A community network was suggested, using the expertise of native Gaelic speaking parents.

Moral support was also identified as being essential: this included more information from the authorities about current research into Gaelic-medium and information on the likely progress of their children compared to children in mainstream. There was a suggestion that the authorities could be more supportive in dealing with anxieties about the delivery of the curriculum.

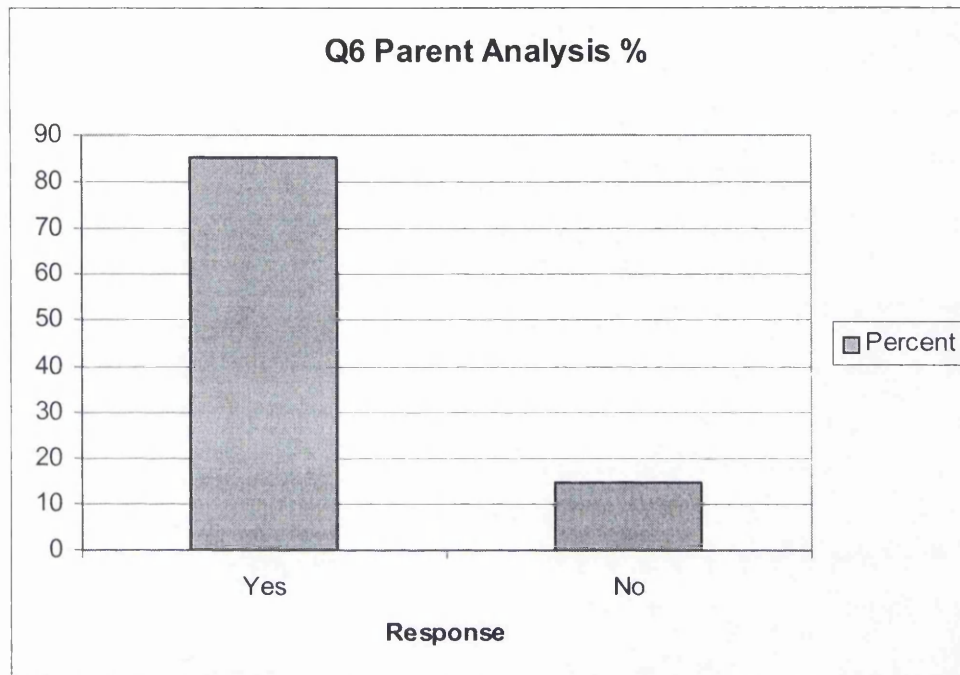
Support for learning was mentioned and the importance of effective reporting to parents on overall progress was also raised. A parent also felt that the importance of the influence of the home in promoting Gaelic fluency has not been stressed by the authority and neither has the input required by parents in developing English skills to a level comparable to pupils in English medium.

One parent raised the important issue of informing parents, both Gaelic and non-Gaelic speaking of the fact that the advantages of Gaelic-medium far outweigh the disadvantages.

Although the question elicited comments relating to areas where support was lacking it was clear that parents had lots of constructive suggestions to make.

## Question 6

**Do you think TV and Radio play an important role for young people in promoting Gaelic education?**



The responses indicated by a large majority that parents felt TV and Radio were important positive educational influences. The comments indicated that there was a strong feeling that Gaelic-speaking children had a great advantage in being directly involved in participating in programmes. TV and radio have not just provided passive experiences but much more interactive opportunities for language enrichment and personal development. Parents felt that children had gained from having their minds broadened and their language experience enriched.

One parent referred to the programmes as being important in terms of education, information and entertainment. The programmes also provide a deeper understanding of Gaelic culture. Another benefit identified was that children would gain in self-confidence and self-expression by being involved in programmes and getting live stage experience. Seven parents mentioned that their children had had actual experience of appearing on programmes.



One parent expressed this strong positive view

*How many English speaking people do you know who have been on TV?*

Television appearances by Gaelic speaking pupils are so common as to make pupils almost blasé about the media.

The few parents who answered 'No' to this question seemed to criticise the quality of current programme formats rather than the potential in general of these media. It was suggested that teenagers were not as likely to watch programmes as younger children were. One parent thought that the quality of programmes on Radio was poor, but a more general feeling was that Radio in itself was less geared to young children than TV, and catered in the main for adult audiences. One response indicated that Gaelic programmes were not well advertised and a parent also mentioned the late timing of programmes commenting that:

*We are very much behind Wales in this respect and still suffer from Saxon thuggery*

The importance and popularity of TV was very much highlighted however and one parent suggested that programme makers should try to be more innovative rather than just translating English programmes, echoing what was said by pupils in the group interviews in Chapter 5.

The question illustrated that although parents had criticisms of the role of the media they could also see the educational advantages and the potential for improvement.



## **Chapter 6 Summary of Findings**

### **Q1 What were your reasons for choosing Gaelic Medium education?**

- Parents wanted children to gain fluency in reading and writing skills and the ability to think in Gaelic.
- They wanted to preserve their cultural heritage
- An overall good education

### **Q2 What have been the benefits?**

- Improved confidence
- Pride in their culture
- Children are better at other languages
- Involvement in other activities

### **Q3 What were the disadvantages?**

- Negative attitudes of others to Gaelic-medium
- Curricular problems

### **Q4 Do you support Gaelic-medium subjects in other subjects?**

- A two thirds majority said 'Yes'
- Parents pointed out the lack of availability

### **Q5 What support for Parents is required?**

- Community network support
- More research
- Gaelic support
- More information to parents of advantages of GME

**Q6 Do TV and radio have an important role in Gaelic education?**

- A large 85% majority of parents thought they had a positive influence
- Some parents indicated their dissatisfaction with limited output and the quality of output

## **Chapter 7 – Views of Head Teachers, Gaelic Teachers and Educationalists**

In this chapter I have analysed the views of those most closely involved in the education of pupils in the Western Isles in the roles of policy making, management and Gaelic teaching. The questions were originally intended to be used in a one-to-one interview format. However, because of the constraints of time and distance, in some cases, I conducted the interview by telephone or had an informal discussion on the issues followed by responses given in writing.

### ***Distribution of Responses***

Three Head Teachers from the region participated, from Lewis, Uist and Barra. Four Gaelic teachers responded, one from each school where I had interviewed pupils. The views of educationalists, currently or previously employed in key roles in the Directorate or in Gaelic development were also sought.

The schedule of interview questions is reproduced in Appendix E.

## Question 1

**How effective do you think Gaelic Medium has been in promoting fluency in the language?**

The responses to this question were, in the main positive, with Head Teachers giving the most unreservedly supportive comments.

*HT1 It has been a vital component in recent years as the numbers of native speakers has dropped. It has also enabled non-native children to have access to the language.*

*HT2 It has been very important in respect of the children involved.*

*HT3 I am aware of the value-added benefit of bilingualism. There have been at least four international studies, which have shown the value-added benefit. The UK is unusual in that it is monolingual. Seventy per cent of the world operates in a multilingual setting... the poor performance in Language needs to be looked at.*

Teachers agreed on the effectiveness but raised concerns about the teaching difficulties encountered as there is less home fluency now and pupils have a greater struggle with basic skills of spelling and grammar.

*T1 Gaelic-medium has been very effective in promoting fluency. More pupils are coming through from primary into secondary school as fluent speakers.*

*T2 Fluency of language is a matter of definition. GME has given those pupils from non-Gaelic speaking families the opportunity to communicate in Gaelic. Although pupils from all backgrounds can communicate in the language, many pupils lack the idiom etc.*

*T3 Some of them are not very secure with grammar even in the spoken word. I hear those saying things like 'aig mi' and that sort of mistake. Even simple things like talking about your family you should be able to say in Gaelic 'I have three brothers', but they get muddled up there. I think they should learn more grammar in primary.*

That last view echoed issues that were raised in the research report, *The Critical Skills*, where teachers defined the main area of difficulty as,

Pitching the language at the right level for a group where some of the pupils understood what the teacher was saying and the others did not. Coping with a mixture of fluent speakers, complete beginners and second language learners.<sup>144</sup>

Whether this was also what was being hinted at in the following comment is unclear, as the teacher did not elaborate on the point:

*T4 [GME is] fairly effective. Its effectiveness has been quite limited in the islands.*

The views of the five educationalists ranged from '*reasonably effective*', to '*extremely effective*'. Comments showed that educationalists had given some thought to the broader issues such as making the best use of the system within its budgetary limitations.

*E1 GME is very effective indeed.*

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<sup>144</sup> MacNeil, M. *The Critical Skills*, 1996: Ch 2.1

E2 *Quite effective. Gaelic is in a better condition because of GME. Also there is greater awareness.*

E3 *[GME is] reasonably effective given support constraints. Other support mechanisms are however required e.g. social activities for pupils, support classes for parents, etc.*

The most enthusiastic respondent commented:

E4 *If not for GME, Gaelic would undoubtedly have died. Although numbers sitting Higher Gaelic are small, they have doubled in the last three years. I think the Gaelic Debate is testament to the growth of GME.*

The Debate referred to is the highly successful inter-schools event which has grown in recent years to sixteen participating schools and is one of the few inputs targeted at the teenage market.

The suggestion that Gaelic-medium education is the only thing keeping Gaelic alive is a sobering statement and something for policy makers to consider. The idea of providing appropriate 'linkage' between school, home and community has been identified by Joshua Fishman,

School language efforts are often not linked to home-family-neighbourhood-community functions. Threatened languages must establish both (1) a priority of function and (2) a priority of linkages between functions in order to derive the maximal benefit from their relatively weak resource base and unfavourable resource competitive setting.<sup>145</sup>

One educationalist commented on the benefits both for children from fluent Gaelic homes and those from non-Gaelic backgrounds, pinpointing as well the need to invest in further research into the efficacy of Gaelic-medium units.

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<sup>145</sup> Fishman, J. *Can Threatened Languages Be Saved?: Reversing Language Shift, Revisited: A 21st Century Perspective*, 2001: 14

E5 *For young children coming into GME from Gaelic speaking homes, GME strengthened their fluency but the main gain was in their Gaelic literacy i.e. their reading and to some extent their writing. For those young children coming from weak use of Gaelic homes or non use of Gaelic homes it provides some element of comprehension and spoken Gaelic ability: it is not easy to generalise as to its effectiveness across GME units. That is where hands-on research is necessary, with Gaelic linguistic tests across all modes i.e. comprehension, speech production, reading ability and writing ability.*

Scotland has been slow to implement the kind of testing mentioned by that educationalist. In the Republic of Ireland where the preservation of the Irish language was adopted as national initiative there was a false impression of fluency created by assessing ability in the written word.

Teaching Irish in schools was a means of promoting a language revival associated with ideas of nationalism. Written tests were set for those wishing to take up careers in the civil service and all school leavers had to pass a written examination in Irish up until 1973.<sup>146</sup>

In recent years the fall in popularity of Irish and its association with identity issues has resulted in a different approach based more on language maintenance than revival. State policies in promoting bilingual education were driven by an insistence on compulsory qualifications in the Irish language. With the end of this policy schools no longer felt obliged to insist on making pupils study Irish in secondary schools.

This is because much of the effort of previous years in promoting the language resulted in providing people with an operational knowledge of the language but who were not sufficiently fluent to transmit the language to the next generation.

A relatively small decline in standards has become the focus for a more long standing feeling of frustration among parents, a belief that their own

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<sup>146</sup> Ó Riagáin, P. *Language Policy and Social Reproduction: Ireland 1893-1993*, 1997: 22

experience of failing to acquire speaking proficiency in Irish at school is being repeated in the case of their children.<sup>147</sup>

More recent research in the Republic of Ireland has therefore focused on assessing spoken ability, to determine levels of fluency. Newer courses are much more based on promoting the spoken word and tests conducted some fifteen years after the introduction of the Nuachursai [New courses] are based on criterion referencing methods developed by the Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Eirinn (ITE) in conjunction with the Department of Education and Educational Research Centre. The main purpose of the research was that

This new data on achievement in spoken Irish should provide a baseline against which future changes in standards can be assessed.<sup>148</sup>

Among the concerns about Gaelic-medium teaching in Scotland pointed to in the document *Teaching in Gaelic-Medium Education* was

Inadequate preparation for the unique professional and pedagogical demands of the Gaelic-medium classroom, for example the philosophical dimension to bilingualism and immersion stage methodology.<sup>149</sup>

Perhaps the new approach of the Republic of Ireland to language acquisition and assessment is worth consideration as there are issues to be faced concerning the direction that Gaelic teaching will take in the future as levels of natural fluency drop.

The issue of linguistic testing of the spoken word is of interest in the context of Gaelic secondary education. It should be noted that for the pupils in my sample who stated a dislike of Gaelic in secondary, the process of formal speaking assessment appeared to be problematic. See Q17, Chapter 4.

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<sup>147</sup> Harris, J. 'Spoken Irish in the Primary School System', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 1988: vol. 70, 69-87.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> General Teaching Council, *Teaching in Gaelic-Medium Education*, 1999: 5.8



Assessment is an area which underpins the rationale of Gaelic in secondary and it is important to consider the impact upon pupils of the fundamental assumptions behind the aims of Gaelic education.

Other considerations such as broader national aims for Gaelic are crucial to the development of a meaningful educational strategy. I will return to the underlying premises which determine our approaches to Gaelic education in Chapter 8 as the ideology behind bilingualism and language preservation underpins national Gaelic initiatives such as the creation of *Bord na Gàidhlig* and the proposals in the Draft Gaelic Bill.

## Question 2

**Do you think pupils in secondary school should study other subjects through the medium of Gaelic?**

In my survey all three Head Teachers agreed that pupils should study other subjects through the medium of Gaelic but whereas one explained that he was in fact pursuing this aim actively, another gave more qualified support to the idea making the proviso that achieving fluency by the end of primary would be sufficient.

*HT1        The opportunity should be provided but if total fluency is achieved by P7, it is not so important as the primary experience laying good foundations.*

Teachers emphasised the practical considerations of staffing but agreed that the option should be made available if parents wished it and there were suitable materials. One teacher felt that:

*T1        ...it reinforces what is done in the Gaelic class if they get the opportunity to use the language in other classes. It extends their vocabulary and their ability to use the language in different situations.*

Educationalists thought that there should be opportunities but one felt that teacher supply was a major constraint. Another respondent's thoughtful response suggested that the over-arching aims of Gaelic-medium should be considered in decisions relating to Gaelic-medium subject provision in secondary.

*E5        One would have to look at the secondary sector as a whole, and where it aims to take the pupils by the time they leave. What is the rationale for some subjects but not others being done through the medium of Gaelic? It is a wide topic and one on which I cannot give an easy opinion.*

It is interesting to compare this response with comments made by pupils in the interviews, who referred to the culture shock they encountered when confronted by the more rigorous

demands of the secondary curriculum in terms of spoken and written accuracy. It is interesting to note that HT 1 thought that there would be no problem if full fluency were to be achieved by the end of primary seven. In the opinion of some pupils, spoken fluency gained in primary did not equip them for the demands of a curriculum in Gaelic that was based more on competence in writing:

*In secondary we were working on completely different things. There was more writing and grammar. I myself find it very different.*

*It was all grammar and we had not done much of that primary.*

One secondary school outwith the Western Isles has been providing a range of subjects to Gaelic-medium pupils and there is evidence from a recent study to show that pupils would benefit from additional study of Gaelic in other subjects to compensate for the reduced 'hands on' Gaelic hours in secondary:

The young people used Gaelic less as they matured. This was not so much the case for those continuing with a partial Gaelic-medium curriculum at the SY2 stage. Within the SY2 group, those continuing with a partial Gaelic-medium curriculum were also more likely to use their Gaelic out and about in the community, beyond the domains where Gaelic was strongly encouraged.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> MacNeil, M. and Stradling, B. *Emergent Identities and Bilingual Education*, 1999-2000: ii

### Question 3

**If yes to 2, how would you like it to be implemented? In which subject areas?**

Head Teachers favoured in principle the implementation of wider access to Gaelic-medium subjects in secondary and specified what was available in their schools. The norm of provision was Gaelic-medium in Social Subjects, and in one of the schools, the Head Teacher was hoping to add Religious Education and Personal and Social Education in order to offset the cut-off that is felt by pupils at the end of primary. He pointed out, however, that the provision is totally governed by the availability of staff and their willingness to become involved.

Teachers expressed the same views and one even extended the desired list of GME subjects to include Home Economics, Mathematics, Technical and Art.

Of the educationalists consulted, one thought that there should be study of at least two secondary subjects and one mentioned that teacher training programmes should have appropriate resource provision. Two thought that, ideally, all subjects should be made available in Gaelic and one educationalist made an even stronger argument.

*E4 In the Western Isles I would like to see opt out rather than opt in. Create a Gaelic section in S1 and all pupils who have received GME go into that one.*

The common caveat in all three groups consulted was that realistically there can only be whatever provision is feasible within timetabling and staffing constraints. One educationalist mentioned that teacher-training programmes should have appropriate resource provision. It is perhaps worth noting that although Scottish Executive funding has allowed some teachers to complete a course to equip them to teach their subject through the medium of Gaelic, there is no certification with this course. This has resulted in a lack of credibility about its value. Also, the funding for training has not been matched with the required investment in additional staffing to release such qualified teachers to take over Gaelic-medium duties in their schools. In the schools of the first cohort of teachers to undertake the course in 1999, there were no immediate changes made to allow those

teachers to involve themselves further in Gaelic-medium education and thereby to capitalise on this investment of providing enhanced learning opportunities to these teachers. This is despite the fact that the report of the 1999 sub-group to the GTC Accreditation and Review Committee contained a strong suggestion for, 'the development of a strategic vision for the future organisation of Gaelic-medium education.'<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> General Teaching Council Report. *Teaching in Gaelic-Medium Education*, 1999: 6.7

## Question 4

**Would you say your school has a Gaelic ethos and if so, how is it evident?**

In this question I was interested in trying to ascertain whether or not the apathetic and intolerant ambience of the schools towards Gaelic, outwith the classroom setting, as identified by some pupils and parents, would be reflected in what was said by the professionals working with and for children. I was not surprised to find that the word 'ethos' was capable of many interpretations as the question had been left open-ended to allow the respondents' own perception of what constituted Gaelic ethos to emerge. Some considered ethos to relate only to the feelings and attitudes that the Gaelic pupils themselves had, others felt that evidence of a quasi neutral tolerance for Gaelic was a positive ethos indicator.

The responses therefore reflect the variety of pre-conceived constructs about Gaelic ethos. Positive ethos factors mentioned by Head Teachers included numbers of pupils opting for Gaelic after S2, numbers of teaching and ancillary staff who could speak Gaelic and visible markers such as signage.

*HT1 Pupils continue studying Gaelic in large numbers in the upper school. Gaelic is spoken by a significant number of staff. Office staff are fluent and able to deal with enquiries in Gaelic.*

Head Teacher 2 responded that there was an ethos evident to some degree, which manifested itself in 'language use'.

However, one Head Teacher has a strong feeling that there were deficiencies and listed what he would like to see.

*HT3 I would like to utilise the local community more as they are a valuable resource. I would like to capitalise on Gaelic as a wonderful feature of the Western Isles and feel that it is a feature that is underplayed at the moment.*

Teachers were more cautious about ethos indicators.

*T1 I am not sure what is meant by a Gaelic ethos. Many classes are set according to whether they are fluent Gaelic speakers. Register classes are set according to their ability to speak Gaelic.*

Another teacher felt that there was a ‘*limited Gaelic ethos*’ but conceded that teachers speaking Gaelic was a positive indicator:

*T2 Limited Gaelic ethos. Pupils do not speak to each other outwith Gaelic classes. Some members of staff do communicate in Gaelic, notably the Head Teacher. There is bilingual signage.*

Others commented:

*T3 We actually set up a Gaelic club last year. Pupils set up a Gaelic web site and e-mailed pen friends. They tended to speak Gaelic in a more natural environment in the club.*

*T4 A good number of pupils achieve good results in exams. We do have a strong involvement in Gaelic music, mainly by participation in local and National Mod.*

Positive markers of Gaelic ethos were reported in terms of what Gaelic pupils themselves did, not what the overall attitude to Gaelic was in the school. Key markers of Gaelic ethos were: pupils achieving good results, strong involvement in Gaelic music mainly by participation in the local and National Mod, and pupils taking part in a Gaelic club.

While these activities are supportive of the Gaelic pupils, it is notable that none of the teachers or Head Teacher respondents referred to the attitudes of non-Gaelic pupils or staff and to the visibility or audibility of Gaelic in the school. Yet the issue of resistance to Gaelic was raised by pupils in the interviews and by parents in their questionnaire responses (see Chapters 5 and 6).

The educationalists identified similar outward markers of Gaelic ethos to those referred to by Head Teachers and teachers. Visual evidence was mentioned, signage and concerts, for example. One felt that ethos-building depended on leadership, but four of the five said that only a few or some schools had a Gaelic ethos. One educationalist suggested looking at wider perception of what constituted ethos and to increase research.

*E5 Basic research would have to be done, using accepted parameters for measuring 'ethos'. For example, the world of the classroom is far removed linguistically and otherwise from the playground or the canteen for example. Changing the overall linguistic mode of an existing institution is very difficult: the organisation is larger than the individuals within it.*

The ethos question is one which has a place in philosophical debate about language policy and planning and in education policies. There were some interesting findings in a recent study of bilingual teenagers, which reveal the real issues related to ethos which confronts teenagers.

The young people felt supported by family and teachers, and it is in the Gaelic classrooms and in the homes, that the use of Gaelic by the young people was most frequently reported. The home domain compared well with the Gaelic classrooms, both of which evidenced a high level of Gaelic use. The extent of Gaelic spoken in the school as a whole was much less than in the Gaelic classrooms.<sup>152</sup>

The findings of this study seem to support what was said by *E5* above in my study and this raises an interesting question about what schools could be doing for Gaelic other than teaching Gaelic as a subject in secondary. Some of the initiatives prevalent in bilingual schools in Wales and Ireland will be considered in Chapter 8. It should also be noted that in the Gaelic-medium school in Glasgow the policy is for all staff' including ancillary staff to have Gaelic. In this way the immersion is seen as inclusive of all personnel in the school. The role that non teaching staff have in engaging with children outwith the



classroom setting clearly has a bearing on providing an overall Gaelic ethos. In chapter 4 of this research 40% of pupils noted that non Gaelic staff spoke Gaelic quite often. They are therefore aware that Gaelic can be used by adults other than teachers in contexts outwith the classroom. Although *E5* notes that the organisation is bigger than the individuals within it, and it is difficult to change the ethos, the existence of a fairly high percentage of Gaelic speakers within the domain of school is perhaps an untapped resource. The situation will vary from school to school but much could be done in the way of providing positive cues around the building alerting pupils to the fact that Gaelic is spoken and understood by the personnel who work there.

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<sup>152</sup> MacNeil, M and Stradling, B. *Emergent Identities and Bilingual Education* 1999-2000: ii.

## Question 5

### How important is the role of parents in promoting fluency?

Head Teachers felt that parents were the most important element in terms of their enthusiasm, encouragement and that the parents and local community was '*a wonderful resource.*'

The classroom teachers thought that the role of parents was crucial and '*more important than the school.*'

Comments also included the observations that parents need to encourage children to speak Gaelic from an early age, and they need to encourage schools to offer Gaelic at all levels. One teacher deplored the fact that Gaelic-speaking parents chose to speak English to their children.

The educationalists also mentioned the crucial role of parents, though one or two also noted that the parents could only work within the limits of their own state of fluency. One raised the issue of ethos in the home.

E5        *[The role is] crucial simply. And you are back to ethos and whether the linguistic ethos of homes is as fixed as that of schools.*

It is interesting to note that in the *Emergent Identities* report, pupils claimed to have confidence in their fluency, most particularly in the home and school: the domains of home and school presenting a supportive environment, and that:

Parents also acted to encourage other more specific activities which strengthened the likelihood of Gaelic use.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> MacNeil, M and Stradling, B. *Emergent Identities and Bilingual Education*. 1999-2000: 8

In my survey of parents' views, the parents seemed to be looking to the school to support them in their aims of improving language use in informal settings, social events, support groups and so on.

The axis of inter-dependence between home, school and community seems therefore to be a crucial factor in the perceived need of support in language speaking as opposed to language learning.

## Question 6

**Outwith curricular developments what measures would you like to see in place to promote the Gaelic language? On a regional basis / on a national basis.**

Some of the responses focussed on the very obvious social events organised through the medium of Gaelic. Head Teachers suggested more youth programmes, magazines and newspapers, more national and regional TV and radio and inter-school Gaelic-medium contact.

Among the responses suggested by class teachers, was more teaching time in Gaelic and active encouragement on the part of parents in the form of opting for Gaelic-medium. It was also suggested that parents speak Gaelic to their children. One teacher felt strongly that political decisions should make Gaelic compulsory in order to fulfil identified aims for promotion of the language.

The idea of local authority and government backing was picked up by most of the educationalists. In addition, they suggested at regional level, bilingual policies and targets, high resourcing for Gaelic, the fostering of high awareness. At the national level, bilingual policies and targets, high resourcing, resource allocation and legal status. But, in addition, there needs to be a community dimension in terms of activities.

*E4      Professor Johnstone said Gaelic could not exist in a vacuum and that is quite true. There should be more community education events, more opportunity for pupils to meet in Debate, Sports, Outdoor Centres, and Fèisean.*

One respondent also felt that the language should exist within a natural speech community. Without this, language development is little more than a hobby.

*E5      The youngsters have to see it almost without full awareness of it, as meeting their many social needs and modes of interest and excitement. But then, the community has to meet those needs in a wider manner or the youngsters will remove themselves soon, and for good.*

## Question 7

### Do you make pupils aware of Gaelic as a minority language?

Two Head Teachers responded in the affirmative but another felt that we tend to neglect the needs of minority language acquisition and do too little too late.

*HT3        We must ask ourselves, are we trying to impart knowledge of a subject to pupils or promote Gaelic?*

One classroom teacher felt that only the older pupils would have a view on this and another observed that pupils were made aware of Gaelic as a living language, and of the benefits and the opportunities that speaking Gaelic offers to them.

The question was both open-ended and ambiguous and elicited responses from the educationalists which were indicative of differing interpretations of the word 'minority.' In one case the respondent treated the word 'minority' as being the converse of majority rather than in the more accepted socio-linguistic sense of 'marginalised.'

*E2        Yes. But it also promotes equality between Gaelic and English.*

Another respondent saw the question as one of mutual responsibility to fulfil a stated remit.

*E1        Education Authority expects schools to promote Gaelic. Schools are expected to promote the Comhairle's Education policy.*

One educationalist thought that the Comhairle should do more than other local authorities. One felt that they did not really make pupils aware of Gaelic as a minority language and another believed that in both the formal and informal settings, education initiatives tended to be inadequate. The point was also made by the same respondent, that schools cannot reverse language decline by themselves.

E5 *The contribution of the school is frequently over emphasised. School was never effective at reading community dynamics or processes. The social sciences did not enter the heart of formal schooling. Formal education tends to go its own merry self-important way.*

This view is endorsed by Joshua Fishman:

It is infinitely easier to socialise children into an environmentally utilised language (no-matter how small that environment may be in relative terms) than into one that remains unutilised outside of the easily compartmentalised school experience.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Fishman J. *Can Threatened Languages Be Saved?* 2001: 15

## Question 8

**What do you think the aims of a secondary school should be in relation to the preservation of the Gaelic language?**

This question elicited further responses which touched on the matter of whether or not schools had an understanding of the importance of a Gaelic ethos outwith the classroom. Head Teachers felt that secondary schools promote Gaelic in order to help pupils to gain good grades in Gaelic that will take them to university and also for access to work in the media. One thought that it should be promoted positively to undo the monoglot thrust of the past generations.

It was also felt to be important to promote the bilingual nature of the schools. Gaelic teachers felt that a main aim should be to promote the use of the language outside the classroom but that there should be good stimulating courses at all levels. The issue of policy making was also raised.

*T2        There has to be political will forthcoming from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar inclusive of clear policies etc. to make Gaelic compulsory for all pupils in primary school and upper secondary school.*

One teacher also specifically mentioned that the region was fortunate to have a development officer who was effective in promoting the aims. Educationalists provided a broad spectrum of ideas which included Gaelic offered to all S1 and S2 pupils and Gaelic in two option columns in S3 to facilitate uptake, subject specialists teaching in Gaelic. Respondents also mentioned staff positively promoting the language, multi-agency presence in schools fostering a Gaelic image visually and verbally and community participation and exchanges. In relation to its role as part of the whole school, one educationalist thought that Gaelic should be seen:

*E1        ...as a language of communication as a natural part of school life, not an afterthought.*

One final comment drew attention once more to the enormous difficulties facing schools in trying to offer Gaelic as a subject and attempting to save the language.

*E5 The task is not theirs to resolve all by themselves. If they try to tackle it by themselves they will feel much frustration and frequent confusion as to where their attempts are leading. Language planning is societal. School is but one domain of language use.*

## **Chapter 7 Summary**

The last comment perhaps sums up the problem facing Western Isles schools, as domains not just of Gaelic language use but of preservation and development. The concept of reversing the language loss and promoting the survival of Gaelic has not been stated overtly in education policy the way that it has in Ireland and Wales. The bilingual system adopted in Wales which is regarded as being both successful and dynamic, operates on the basis of three convictions:

That such an education encourages a sense of national pride in the language, literature, history and geography of Wales. That the high quality of education offered is a distinct advantage over other forms of state education and that in an increasingly competitive job market, knowing Welsh has high added value.<sup>155</sup>

This is in stark contrast to the three areas of neglect of Gaelic identified by Nancy Dorian in her study of language loss in East Sutherland, and that were mirrored in the Hebrides. She notes that the government at the time:

... excluded it as a medium of communication. They excluded it from the

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<sup>155</sup> Williams, C. H. 'The Celtic World,' in Fishman, J. *A Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity* 1999: 278



curriculum for the most part, and in taking both these actions they transmitted to the community at large a low assessment of the value and utility of the Gaelic language.<sup>156</sup>

In this section of the research, informants were in agreement that Gaelic-medium offers a high standard of education. However, it is interesting to consider the responses to question 4, the question on Gaelic ethos, as these illustrated a tendency to perceive Gaelic as being successful only as a subject on the curriculum, with classroom activities being the sole domain of language use. Surprisingly not all respondents seemed to accept that identity and ethnicity issues should be addressed as part of Gaelic ethos in schools.

How to provide a wider language context in which to make use of Gaelic within and outwith the school is a question that has to be addressed even from the standpoint of teachers who are currently coping with pupils whose fluency lacks '*blas*' i.e. is less idiomatic and may be at times ultimately less grammatically correct. Teachers feel that the limited contexts for speech, result in a limited awareness of irregular constructions and the prevalence of the type of Gaelic 'howlers' sometimes heard when pupils are interviewed on the radio. E.g. '*Faicidh sinn*', rather than '*Chì sinn*' for 'We shall see'.

One of the findings of the '*Emergent Identities*' report was that 'the Gaelic-medium experience of the pupils in that study was not supported by the English ethos of the school as a whole.'<sup>157</sup> It appears that the same conclusion could be made of the secondary schools of the Western Isles. One teacher in my sample offered the comment that if pupils even studied one other subject through the medium of Gaelic in secondary, it would make a difference to their fluency and confidence.

It remains for policy makers to take on board the concept that secondary education in Gaelic may be in a sense, a teenage flight from fluency, where language skills are being diminished by restricted opportunities for use, enthusiasm dampened by the knowledge that secondary school Gaelic is grammar orientated and their growing reticence to speak

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<sup>156</sup> Dorian, N. *Language Death*, 1981: 84.

<sup>157</sup> MacNeil, M and Stradling, B. *Emergent Identities and Bilingual Education*, 1999-2000: ii.

Gaelic is governed by the peer pressure of conformity to a majority English language domain.

The school may be seen as a micro-society, reflecting the viewpoints and mores of a broader national scene, yet one of the educationalists in my study observed that formal national developments, while adding to the feeling that Gaelic language and culture exist do not replace the need for

*E5        A naturalistic speech community. The lack of this would make language development little more than a hobby. Thus, how children are enabled to use Gaelic and live in a natural way in their community and ideally in their workplace as they grow older, is the deciding factor.*

The responses of teachers and Head Teachers in this chapter are indicative of an acceptance that Gaelic does not co exist with English on a parallel footing, even though large numbers of the pupils in their schools are Gaelic speakers who have expressed a choice for Gaelic in their lives.

The information gleaned from these interview questions was illuminating in several respects. Firstly, it showed the differing views of individuals but I was also interested to see whether or not discrete groups had convergent views. Although the interviews are purely impressionistic it did seem that a pattern emerged in the responses with Head Teachers making more generalised responses, which conjured up a rosier picture than the views of teachers. Class teachers tended to illustrate practical difficulties and were less fulsome in their praise of the system, perhaps because their perceptions are based on imperatives relating to exam success. The educationalists responded in a way that frequently reflected their tendency to see the broader philosophical and ideological considerations. There were no great dichotomies of opinion, however, and the responses provide an interesting overview of professional perceptions which can be compared with both the views of pupils, and the views expressed by parents. The greatest difference of perception could be seen in the responses to question 4, the question on Gaelic ethos, where the views of teachers, Head Teachers differed from those of educationalists.

## Chapter 8 – Regeneration and Stewardship

In his research into the effectiveness of bilingual education Colin Baker outlined the positive outcomes for children who had the opportunity to learn through a heritage language.

Studies suggest that the children's attitudes are positive when placed in heritage language education. When the home language is used in school there is the possibility that a child's self-esteem and self concept will be enhanced.<sup>158</sup>

He goes on to say that a child who is mainstreamed is vulnerable to a loss of self-esteem and status. The home language and culture may seem disparaged.

The school system and the teachers may seem latently or manifestly to be rejecting the child's home language and values.<sup>159</sup>

Highlighting the findings of the Canadian Education Association, 1991, Baker also listed eight advantages of heritage language programmes:

- positive self concept and pride in one's background
- better integration of child into school and society
- more tolerance of other people and different cultures
- increased cognitive, social and emotional development
- ease in learning of new languages
- increased probability of employment
- fostering stronger relationships between home and school
- responding to the needs and wishes of the community.

It is interesting to note that some pupils and parents themselves in my sample identified some of these as having been achieved through Gaelic-medium education. Namely,

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<sup>158</sup> Baker C. *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 1993: 178

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

positive self concept, better integration of child into school and society, increased cognitive, social and emotional development, ease in learning a new language, better employment prospects, The respondents' own views therefore confirm what has been established as desirable both by Baker and in other research.<sup>160</sup>

Baker acknowledges the work done by Marcel Danesi on research findings on heritage language programmes in Canada:

Indeed the indication from research is that language minority children tend to prosper more in such education than when placed in mainstream education. They maintain and enrich their home language and culture. Their performance throughout the curriculum does not suffer. This notably includes performance in the second language, majority language. Cognitive enhancement can also occur.<sup>161</sup>

Broadly speaking these findings are similar to research findings on Gaelic immersion programmes in primary schools in Scotland.<sup>162</sup> It appears that the product is indeed tailored to the needs of the customer in primary school, given that the eight outcomes listed above by Baker are accepted as desirable.

Baker also indicates further desirable conditions for effective immersion education such the importance of teacher commitment and partnership with parents. A more cogent point is made however about the broader aims of bilingualism:

Behind immersion education is political, social and cultural ideology. Immersion education is not just in a second language. Such bilingual education has aims and assumptions, beliefs and values that sometimes differ from, other times are additional to, mainstream education. It is important to see immersion education not just as a means to promote bilingualism, but also as a move to a different kind of society.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> MacNeil M and Stradling R, *Emergent Identities and Bilingual Education*: 1999

<sup>161</sup> Danesi, M. *Revisiting the Research Findings on Heritage Language Learning*, cited in Baker 1993:179

<sup>162</sup> Johnstone R. *The Attainments of Pupils Receiving Gaelic Medium Education in Primary School*, 1999

<sup>163</sup> Baker, C. *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 1993: 177

In some of the questions in Chapter 4 of my research there was a positive recognition among the pupils of the value of Gaelic in terms of involvement in cultural and social events (see benefits of Gaelic in chapter5 Summary.) Pupils also saw Gaelic very positively as having a role in their possible future employment (see Q18). In addition there was a fairly positive identity reference between having Gaelic and being Scottish. This however did not give them enough confidence in the language to use it in domains outwith school (see Q21). They did not have a great impression of the role that studying Gaelic has brought to their awareness of themselves as Gaels but this is perhaps just a feature of the lack of a discrete cultural heritage component in their Gaelic education. Language skills, on the other hand, were noted as being highly valued. 'Being bilingual' lagged slightly behind in importance, perhaps because of the value placed by the schools on academic achievement (see Q19). Nevertheless it has to be acknowledged that there is a conditioning process at play which encourages pupils to absorb and accommodate to the view that the main purpose of their secondary education in Gaelic is to get a good grade in a national examination. Usefulness of language is more highly prioritised than use of language both by the schools and by pupils themselves. Using the language with friends for example was a rare occurrence, even within the domain of school (see Q21).

### ***The Needs of Bilingual Pupils***

The Gaelic-medium pupil is both privileged, in having the language and the opportunity to study it, and vulnerable because the situation for the language itself is vulnerable. In reviewing some of the difficulties encountered in the bilingual education process Baetens-Beardsmore (1986) identified several areas of potential difficulty for the bilingual. The pupil may feel marginalised outwith the mainstream or parents may have had to overcome reservations about the possible effects on cognitive development and possible personality problems that their children may encounter in being part of a linguistic minority. Sociological and psychological factors can condition attitude and motivation especially when there is social distance between groups and they are culturally divergent.<sup>164</sup> Pupils and parents are dependent on good policy decisions at a local level and a decisive

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<sup>164</sup> Baetens Beardsmore H, *Bilingualism: Basic Principles*, 1991, 157

programme of language regeneration at a national level. Baetens Beardsmore also suggests that 'any pedagogic, psychological or linguistic development will be faced with risks if left to chance or well intentioned improvisation'.<sup>165</sup> Underpinning these variables there is an additional layer of influence. The ambience in society as a whole towards minority language is a crucial factor in the way Gaels perceive themselves and Gaelic itself is subject to changing political ideologies in relation to language maintenance.

### ***Gaelic Language and Scottish Identity***

Gaelic-medium education, because it has not just been confined to the peripheral habitats associated with Gaelic, has begun to impinge on the national consciousness. Gaelic speakers have begun to reconsider their own identity and the status of their language in the discourses on the place of Gaelic within a devolved Scotland. There is a geographical separateness created by the Minch which confers remote status on islanders. There has also been an equally powerful psychological barrier created by the language divide which I believe has resulted in Gaelic speakers throughout Scotland viewing themselves and being viewed as different and in some way outwith the main stream of the English speaking Scotland. Cohen (2000) draws attention to the notion that Scotland itself is subject to a perception or representation of being on the margins of a stronger whole nation. Power and peripherality are he says 'in the eyes of their beholders' and there is a confusing paradox created by the assumption of a relationship with the rest of Britain in which 'Scotland is cast as weaker, even dependent, exploited - and yet as the repository of more substantial values.'<sup>166</sup> The new devolved Scotland is likely to have a problem in deciding whether or not Gaelic is to remain as a peripheral interest or is to become reborn as occupying the centre ground as a marker of Scottishness. Gaels themselves may have to hang onto their language and culture more aggressively or risk the language degenerating into what has been described as merely a symbolic marker of identity. (MacDonald 1997). The rapid pace of language loss for the Gaels has happened in tandem with a loss of cultural identity both locally and nationally as the traditional markers of a separate culture have declined. The net effect on pupils in the Western Isles is that the natural loci of Gaelic use have all but disappeared. Pupils in my study accepted that beyond the formal

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid: 178

and somewhat artificially created domain of school there would be limited opportunities to speak Gaelic, yet there was also a recognition that in some ways, through public cultural events, competitions and ceilidhs, Gaelic was valued and admired.

Parents in making this educational commitment to Gaelic had demonstrated a loyalty based on a belief that Gaelic was a precious gift. Some could even see that being able to read and write Gaelic was better than just being able to speak the language: an acknowledgement that they themselves had operated in an educationally deprived environment (see Appendix D). Given that pupil and parental experience of GME is positive there must therefore be an explanation why the uptake within the islands is not higher. Gaelic is threatened partly because of external factors such as the growth of global economics but it is threatened from within by the lack of loyalty of the potential cohorts of parents who do not opt for Gaelic-medium education. What is it that prevents such parents from seeing the 'big picture' i.e. the proven academic advantages of bilingualism and the possible cultural benefits to themselves? It has been noted for example in the MacPherson report that unless the domains of use multiply, the language will become completely endangered.<sup>167</sup>

The answer may lie in the fact that because there is not a strong awareness from Gaels that Gaelic speaking strengthens the sense of Scottish identity there is not much in the way of fervour about preserving it. This raises an interesting issue about language loyalty explored by McLeod, (2003). He considers the notions of language loyalty and ethnic identity and compares the positions in Wales and the Basque country. Welsh and Basque which are seen as national languages have been in receipt of strong political support for their language policies whereas Scotland has not as yet achieved official status of Gaelic as a national language. As evidence of the value that this support has had, he illustrates the high rate of intergenerational language transmission, in homes where two parents speak the language, both in the Basque country (100%) and in Wales (93%). In Scotland the rate is only 73% and this has to be seen in the context that only 26% of all children in the Western Isles are in GME. McLeod points out:

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<sup>166</sup> Cohen A, *Signifying Identities*. Peripheral Vision 2000: 49

<sup>167</sup> MacPherson et al, , *Revitalising Gaelic, a National Asset*: 2002

In equivalent communities in Wales and the Basque Country, where doubts about the importance and value of the minority language have largely been dispelled, education through the minority language is effectively universal.<sup>168</sup>

Parents in the Western Isles who are failing to identify with Gaelic as a part of their culture and with attempts to revitalise Gaelic culture and to promote Gaelic education have not been won over by regenerative efforts to date. This can perhaps be explained by considering the approach to language revitalisation in Scotland. An approach so fragmented that it begs the question is the language being utilised to revitalise the culture or vice versa? This issue which will be discussed later in this chapter is one which has been viewed with some cynicism by islanders as they have been part of a developmental strategy which has placed project culture at the heart of developments aimed at revitalising first the economy, and the language only by a washback effect as a secondary benefit..

To consider the notion of regeneration it is important first to understand the terms in which the concept of language loss has been presented. In Sharon MacDonald's model, language loss is perceived as a loss of something that is symbolic of a heritage and culture.

Within this model, language use is conceptualised not so much as a pragmatic matter as an affective, symbolic and political one; and the decline in a people's language is seen as alienation, perhaps even repression. The loss of a heritage language is seen as a loss of identity<sup>169</sup>

Aspects of this type of alienation were noted by Macdonald in the defensive and sometimes ambivalent attitudes adopted by some of her informants. Although immersed in Gaelic, they did not always identify with the regenerative processes on its behalf. As discussed earlier in this research, this attitudinal problem can be to some extent attributed to the consequences of the forceful repression of Gaelic in the post Culloden period, one of which was surely the sense of loss of identity and culture. In the recent history of the islands attempts to regenerate the economy for example by setting up the infrastructure of defence installations only served to dilute the indigenous culture, both in terms of luring

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<sup>168</sup> Macleod W. 'Gaelic Medium Education in the International Context' In *Gaelic in Education*, Nicolson M, and MacIver M (eds.) 2003: 17



thecrofting populace into other modes of employment and by dilution of the Gaelic language.

Language regeneration has only in very recent years been brought into prominence even in academic circles and the percolation of the concerns to grass roots has been slow. Fishman equates the threat of language loss to the loss of culture itself, and suggests that those who agitate on behalf of threatened languages do so in order to achieve autonomy over 'the processes of sociocultural change that globalisation fosters.'<sup>170</sup> The revival of a language may therefore be considered as a human right, something that is required in a just society. Looking at the political implications of the role of languages in culture it is noted by the social anthropologist Mary Kalantzis that the promotion of minority languages is now used by governments to support ideas of national culture. She asks the question. 'Is assimilation to one's ancestral culture always unequivocally a moral good?'<sup>171</sup> According to the views of sociolinguist Glyn Lewis there is no doubt on the issue. He sees the task of bilingual education as 'to maintain the traditional cultures, to further the development of a broad national culture as well as our understanding of it, and finally to provide the conditions where each type of culture reinforces and supports the other.'<sup>172</sup> He even goes as far as to say that 'the use of a child's language is something to which he is morally entitled.'<sup>173</sup>

If this is accepted as a given then the reinforcement of a culture through language should be manifest both in schools and at the local community and national levels. We may as a society need to look at ways of putting the views of academics more into the public domain and in terms which the lay person can accept. Oliver, (2002) subscribed to the view that young people negotiated their identities according to circumstances.<sup>174</sup> Their lives are often a balancing act of using language Gaelic or English as circumstances demanded or as their confidence allows. In my section on pupil interviews there was also an ambivalence shown. Gaelic was valued, in the arenas where it could be showcased, and in comfort zones such as churches, with older people and at local Gaelic events, (see

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<sup>169</sup> MacDonald, S. *Reimagining Culture: Histories, Identities and the Gaelic Renaissance*. 1997: 219

<sup>170</sup> Fishman J. *Can Threatened Languages be Saved?* 2001: 6

<sup>171</sup> Kalantzis, M, Cope, B, and Slade, D. *Minority Languages and Dominant Culture*, 1989: 10

<sup>172</sup> Lewis, E G. *Bilingualism and Bilingual Education*, 1981, cited in *Minority Language and Dominant Culture*, Kalantzis, Cope and Slade, 1989:10

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> Oliver, J. *Young People and Gaelic in Scotland*, 2002: 52

Chapter 4, Q22) but there was also a reserve about using it based on a perhaps false assumption that other people would not want to hear it: presumably because its use places the Gaelic secondary school pupil in a vulnerable socially marginalised role, outwith the norm. In reinventing this identity as a Gaelic speaker, who only uses Gaelic in restricted settings the young person is not consciously making a decision about language, but more a decision about group status. Nevertheless it is also a statement about the perceived status of Gaelic. The pupil, already affected by the normative assessments he makes about his national identity, and his Gaelic identity also falls victim to a form of localised cultural uniformity.

The social anthropologist Michel de Certeau believed that ethnic groups within a dominant culture can co-exist as 'minor' cultures, complementing rather than being inferior to the major, but that the current ideologies of economic globalisation and cultural uniformity militate against this. De Certeau sought to define the cultural dissonances which are at play in education in terms of what is apparent in the broader social spectrum. Political systems demand cultural uniformity but de Certeau wishes to acknowledge that the person from the minor or minority culture is perceived as being a contradiction of a perceived norm. He suggests that,

The more complex conventions within which we live accept that the clash of different cultures within a particular system cannot but threaten the assumption on which the dominant culture is based.<sup>175</sup>

This is important in terms of what happens in education if we accept De Certeau's analysis that 'the school reproduces societies norms.'<sup>176</sup> If we accept as a given that the norm in Scottish society is to base social policy on the premise that English is the statutory language then this does not do justice to the rights of Gaelic speakers as members of an indigenous language group. It would not be fair on Gaelic to make its speakers compete with the different cultures in Scotland in order to claim ethnic bargaining power yet the unwillingness for example of the City of Edinburgh council to address the demand for a Gaelic medium school suggest that Gaelic has no more priority than any other language

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<sup>175</sup> De Certeau M, *The Management of Ethnic Resources: Schooling for Diversity in Multicultural Education*, 1987: 164

spoken by immigrants to Scotland. The decision to provide Gaelic-medium secondary education in Glasgow served to highlight some of the existing anomalies of funding and has provoked debate in the letters pages of Scottish newspapers and is indicative of the view held by some that the needs of Gaelic speakers should be pursued more aggressively within a national policy.

The decision calls into question the Gaelic policies of other local authorities, in particular Edinburgh and the Western Isles. It is a mark of shame that Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, with a population that is more than 60% Gaelic-speaking has yet to open a Gaelic-medium primary, never mind a secondary. Surely it is time it followed its counterparts in Wales to make Gaelic-medium the default education, unless otherwise stated by parents. Edinburgh too should look to Wales where Cardiff has some 2,000 primary pupils educated through Welsh.<sup>177</sup>

In a response to this letter the Gaelic education spokesman of *Comhairle nan Eilean Siar*, Western Isles Council, offered a rebuttal, pointing out that the Gaelic initiatives in the islands and in Edinburgh have to be funded from the regional budget and unlike the proposed Glasgow initiatives for Gaelic education, the isles and Edinburgh are not funded by the Scottish Executive. His protestations can at best be seen as a damage limitation exercise. The newspaper correspondence brings to light the confusion that is caused by the lack of a nationally coherent policy for Gaelic education. Even the proposals of the draft Gaelic Bill, now adopted as an Act, went no further than 'securing the status of Gaelic as one of the languages of Scotland.'<sup>178</sup> This statement does not appear to emphasise strongly enough the centrality of Gaelic either as an indigenous language or as a special case.

## ***Gaelic Revitalisation and Cultural Development***

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<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 166

<sup>177</sup> Gunn E, *The Scotsman*, 26<sup>th</sup> May 2004: Letters page,

<sup>178</sup> *Gaelic Language Scotland Draft Bill (Consultation Draft)* 2003:1

Although it is not central to this research, the commodification of Gaelic has been a double edged sword in the revitalisation process and presents another facet of the complex picture of Gaelic society within the islands and in the Scottish scene. Unfortunately the process of politicising language revival has muddied the issue as the language revival initiatives have become part of an economic development strategy. Gaelic has become a marketable product to the extent that development bodies refer to 'the Gaelic economy.'<sup>179</sup> Sharon MacDonald also notes; there is a trend towards including Gaelic, 'in the, touristic marketing of Scotland as a whole.'<sup>180</sup> It is perhaps this feeling of lack of ownership of the initiatives that have led to a sense of apathy and a lack of personal involvement on the part of Gaelic speakers. Frequently, local industries which are satellites of the tourist industry, craft shops and so on are owned and run by non Gaelic speakers who have settled on an island to run a small business as a retirement project. Heller (2003) has noted some of the anomalies that can be produced as a result of such a strategy. When language becomes part of this market, commodification redefines language as a talent or an inalienable characteristic of group members. It operates simultaneously with authenticity to make it marketable and produce new forms of competition and social selection:

At the same time authenticity is commodified ...sometimes in the form of cultural products (music, crafts, dance, for example), and often with no link to language.<sup>181</sup>

There are also complex attitudes to Gaelic emanating from outwith the Gaelic fold. If Gaelic is to be fêted as both a market commodity and as a marker of Scottish identity how and where in terms of identity does this place other Scots or those outsiders who have settled in the Western Isles who have no cultural attachment to Gaelic? The commodification of language itself in the job market can be a source of tension. Heller has also pointed out the way language as a workplace skill is exploited in the service elements of the new economy. Coupland, (2003) notes the importance within the field of sociolinguistic research of the concept of language now being perceived as 'an identity resource.'<sup>182</sup> This tendency could be advantageous for Gaelic, and indeed my pupil

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<sup>179</sup> McEwan - Fujita E. *Gaelic in Scotland, Scotland in Europe*, 2003:53

<sup>180</sup> MacDonald S. *Reimagining Culture: Histories, Identities and the Gaelic Renaissance*. 1997: 240

<sup>181</sup> Heller, M. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 7/4:2003, 473- 492

<sup>182</sup> Coupland, N. 'Sociolinguistics and Globalisation' in *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 7/4: 465-472

respondents and the parents had high expectations of the value that Gaelic would have in the job market.

That there is confusion about the place of Gaelic in an emergent self-governing and self confident Scotland is clear. Some make the error of categorising Gaelic language preservation only as an issue of cultural assimilation. In doing so they confuse the human rights issues of other minorities with the moral argument for Gaelic language survival and this is never more illustrated than when there is a positive initiative announced for Gaelic. The news that a Gaelic secondary school was to open in Glasgow was greeted warmly by the Educational Institute of Scotland Area Secretary, Willie Hart. As reported in an article in the Glasgow Herald on May 22<sup>nd</sup> 2004, he hoped “the executive would show similar generosity to other minority linguistic cultures in Glasgow.”<sup>183</sup> It is unfortunate that this prominent union in supporting the same rights for other language minorities manages to misrepresent the issue. The standpoint as expressed by the union spokesman failed to acknowledge the status that Gaelic should have as an indigenous threatened language, and it also suggested that there is an equivalence between Gaelic and the other minority cultures, which within themselves are in no way threatened with extinction. Surely an initiative introduced exclusively for the benefit of Gaelic speakers should be welcomed for what it is doing to save a heritage language of Scotland. Concern about other languages used in Scotland is a separate matter and as there is no likelihood of these languages dying out it seems inappropriate that issues surrounding them, i.e. issues of assimilation into a Scottish community are being highlighted.

Gaelic is affected both by local and by national development policies which although capable of contributing to broader cultural aims, obscure the language preservation issue itself. There is a sense therefore in which it is, ‘consum’d by that which it is nourish’d by,’ as Shakespeare said in Sonnet 73. In other words the attempts to preserve culture in the broader sense (music, drama, the arts in general) are diverting assets and endeavour into areas peripheral to Gaelic medium education.

There is in my view a great risk in encompassing the language survival issue within the domain of cultural developments. There has been a certain confusion caused by the

tendency to make Gaelic language synonymous with its culture. Culture, in the sense of mass culture; the arts, should not be confused with the cultural needs of a language. Mass culture embraces many things that I regard as being peripheral to the language issue. It may well be that in the broader canvas of language maintenance the preservation of Gaelic culture through the promotion of the arts and music may have effects beneficial to the Gaelic language. Cultural developments raise awareness of language issues, promote tourism, give a positive feel-good effect but are possibly as useful to the salvation of Gaelic as the violin players on the 'Titanic' were in preventing the sinking of the ship. People accepted their fate on a sinking ship with more composure, but the playing of music could not obvert the tragedy.

Pupils in the Western Isles have grown up in a dying culture, not quite aware of how close Gaelic has come to being completely eclipsed by English but their parents and educationalists at least are aware that it has been imbued nationally in the press with tropes of death.<sup>184</sup> MacDonald also argues that 'identities which cannot express that which is authentically *self* – are medicalised as 'split' 'repressed' or 'schizophrenic'.<sup>185</sup> If this is accepted then our young people are to some extent victims of the defensive and apathetic Gaelic psyche which is the result of centuries of hostility and neglect. It could be argued that the development initiatives of the last twenty five years, *fèisean*, Arts Council initiatives and the work of CNAG have attempted to address such issues but we must also ask the question are they now part of a resurgence, the locus of which is moving away from prioritisation of language regeneration towards a broader development of 'ethnic' arts and culture as symbolic markers of Gaelic language identity. The question must be asked should the resources be spent on Gaelic-medium education within schools or just within communities or is there an accommodation which makes a significant contribution to both education and the arts. In which area is the input most likely to reverse language loss?

At a national level there has been at times a climate of hostility towards Gaelic in which the regenerative processes on behalf of the language have been disparaged by the press and in other media such as TV. During the 1990's the culture of monolingualism that prevailed was evident for example in negative reporting of the national mod referring to the language

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<sup>183</sup> Buie, E. 'Scotland's First Gaelic Secondary School', *The Glasgow Herald* 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2004: pp 2-3

<sup>184</sup> McEwan - Fujita E, *Gaelic in Scotland, Scotland in Europe*, 2003:261

in disparaging terms. There were criticisms of proposals to have bilingual road signs and Gaelic revitalisation was described by one columnist as, 'government aided nostalgia.'<sup>186</sup> These examples, in the view of McEwan Fujita (2003), 'underscoring the all-or-nothing position of monolingual standard language ideology — that there is room for only one language in a national public sphere.'<sup>187</sup>

It is my view that there are factors at play in conditioning the children who go through Gaelic-medium education because we as a nation are conditioned into accepting an over democratising process which attempts to equalise rather than prioritise rights. Civic identity is encouraged, as can be seen in the Scottish Executive's proposals for education in citizenship, but claims to ethnic identity are somehow perceived as being divisive.

Until recently the responsibility for Gaelic education was within the remit of the minister for Arts and Cultural Heritage and not the responsibility of the Minister for Education: a state of affairs deplored by Nicolson and MacIver in their research into Gaelic-medium education. 'In a world where GME is seen as one of the factors which will impact on the survival of the language, that simply does not make sense.'<sup>188</sup> The confusion about the importance of Gaelic, relative to other educational issues can be seen in the following quotation, which is Priority number 3 of the Scottish Executive's own national priorities for education:

To promote equality and help every pupil benefit from education with particular regard paid to pupils with disabilities and special educational needs and to Gaelic and other lesser used languages.<sup>189</sup>

The fact that the Gaelic language issue is hidden between special needs and other minority languages suggests a lack of awareness of the crucial need to make a special case for Gaelic on the basis that it is a dying language.

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<sup>185</sup> MacDonald S. *Reimagining Culture*, 1997, 5

<sup>186</sup> Morrison M. August 15<sup>th</sup> Daily Mail 1996

<sup>187</sup> McEwan - Fujita, E. *Gaelic in Scotland, Scotland in Europe* 2003: 197

<sup>188</sup> Nicolson, M. and MacIver M. 'Contexts and Futures,' *Gaelic Medium Education*, 2003: 68

<sup>189</sup> <http://www.nationalpriorities.org.uk/Priority3.html>.

Perhaps the Scottish Executive will be influenced by the views of tertiary education students themselves whose opinions seem to show that they celebrate and value their identity as bilinguals. (Nicolson 2003) In her study of the views of students on the Scottish identity issue those who were bilingual showed that they regarded language highly as an identity indicator. Monolinguals in the same study gave language a lower rating.

We assume this is because they do not reflect upon it in a conscious way or have no necessity in their living or working contexts to make it an emblem of who they are. As we might expect, those from a multilingual background have a greater sensitivity to the place of language.<sup>190</sup>

This type of finding in support of language as an identity marker was endorsed in my research in the interviews I conducted when one pupil from Uist said,

*You don't realise it but your language is you.*

Another pupil from the interview group discussing the identity issue said:

*Yes, Gaelic makes you more Scottish.*

My research data (Chapter 4, Q18) reveals that a substantial proportion of pupils in my survey thought that Gaelic made them feel more Scottish. However in my interviews with pupils the groups were keenly aware of the subservient role of their language. This quotation from one group is typical of the reservations expressed by the pupils about the public use of their language outside the domain of the classroom.

*There is peer pressure to use English. In secondary the culture is English and there is nothing we can do to change it.*

This is the sense in which the perceived norms of English language dominance are internalised and embraced in our schools. If our Scottish culture relegates Gaelic to a

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<sup>190</sup> Nicolson, M. 'Language and Who We Are: Some Scottish Student Perspectives', *Scottish Educational Review*, 2003: vol. 35, no. 2.



backward status prescribed by the English dominant monolinguals unaware of the value of bilingualism is it not surprising that parents and pupils accept the same dominance in schools? An educationalist in my survey observed that school is but one domain of language use but it appears that for Gaelic school has become a strong domain of preservation and one which has given pupils a powerful sense of their Scottishness and an awareness of the history of the Highlands and Islands. A study of Q18 data in Appendix B shows this clearly.

### ***Gaelic in National Focus***

In government circles current thinking about reversing language loss in Scotland appears to be no more than politically correct cosmetics. The European Commission has recently slated the government for its lack of language policy in relation to Gaelic. In *An Gàidheal Ùr*, Murchadh MacLeòid made reference to this, lampooning the current stance of the Scottish Executive on Gaelic:

An e dìreach mise a th'ann no a bheil leisgeulan riaghaltas na h-Alba son cho leam-leat is a tha iad mu dheidhinn suidheachadh na Gàidhlig a'fas nas coltaiche ri rud a thigeadh a Mars? [*Is it just me or are the Scottish Executive's excuses for their halfhearted attitude to Gaelic like something out of Mars?*]<sup>191</sup>

The Council of Europe Report he refers to asserts that in Scotland:

There is no legislation with the explicit purpose of protecting and promoting Scottish Gaelic, nor is there an adopted language policy. This seems to lead to a certain insecurity and confusion regarding what duties and responsibilities are placed on official bodies and institutions.<sup>192</sup>

<sup>191</sup> MacLeòid, Murchadh. Column in *An Gàidheal Ùr*, Adhartas na Gàidhlig na mhasladh dha Riaghaltas na h-Alba An Cèitean, 2004: 8 [my translation]

<sup>192</sup> Council of Europe Report. *Application of the Charter in the United Kingdom* 2004: para. 22

Many of the proposals in the Gaelic Bill, now incorporated in law as the *Gàidhlig* Act, related to improving the public role of Gaelic. Within the context of Fishman's paradigm for reversing language shift this seems to address what is outlined in stage one and two of Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption scale for threatened languages, i.e. That there is some use of minority language in higher education, work sphere, mass media and government operations at national level and that there is some use at local/regional mass media and government services.<sup>193</sup> The proposed legislation for Gaelic seems to be over concentrated on these first two stages at the expense of others. It may be more beneficial to focus on Stages 6 and 4 namely, 'Minority languages passed on from generation to generation and used in the community', and 'formal compulsory education available in minority language.'<sup>194</sup> The need to improve the public role of Gaelic was discussed at length by Charles Withers in *Gaelic in Scotland*. He demonstrated that Gaelic has moved to some extent from its traditional context of rural obscurity into a more dispersed landscape with many exiled islanders in urban settings rescuing Gaelic from language death by learning Gaelic. However, as Withers notes; 'Wherever Gaelic is spoken, much has still to be done to stem its decline and to increase its role in Scottish affairs.'<sup>195</sup>

Increasing its role in Scottish affairs is on the agenda of the Gaelic Act but the proposals to recommend the use of Gaelic rather than stipulate its use are in danger of being seen as tokenistic. In view of the utter lack of confidence in the usage of Gaelic demonstrated by some of the pupils whom I interviewed, it seems questionable whether there will be a significant enough cohort of speakers in the next generation able to put any of the Act's language aims into practice. In considering the evolution of language policy and planning, Ricento (2000) asks, 'Why do individuals opt to use (or cease to use) particular languages and varieties for specified functions in different domains and how do these choices influence – or how are they influenced by institutional language policy decision making?'<sup>196</sup> Policy makers should be questioning the reasons for language change at the micro and macro levels of society. If the domains of use are restricted, and not managed appropriately within the revitalisation or there is ambivalence and lack of confidence in the way that the language is experienced in education the chances of survival are limited.

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<sup>193</sup> Fishman, J. *Can Threatened languages be Saved?* 2001: 466

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> Withers, Charles. *Gaelic in Scotland 1698-1981: The Geographical History of a Language*: 1984, 241

<sup>196</sup> Ricento, T. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 2000: 4/2, 208

Although pupils in my survey did perceive Gaelic to be closely linked to the promotion of their culture, there was an unspoken taboo about appearing to 'hype up' their culture or sense of identity by using it in any non-classroom context. One pupil wrote:

*You can't speak Gaelic outside the classroom because other people might not want to hear it.*

This is a statement redolent of centuries of negative conditioning in Gaelic culture in addition to a lifetime of negative conditioning for the pupil as an individual.

Gaelic however is far removed now from any association it had in the past with political power or a national cultural identity. It is identified by many as a Hebridean or island language and has become both demographically and in the mindset of many synonymous with marginalisation. Popular caricatures of Gaeldom, haggis and kilt stereotyping have promoted widespread ignorance of the culture. In this writer's own experience some army families billeted in the Uists referred to the locals as 'troggs' (troglodytes). Such a label implies that Gaelic speakers are savages with no culture. These stigmas have been internalised by the indigenous population to the extent that being perceived as being more Gaelic is also regarded as being less civilised. This is confirmed by the experience, albeit anecdotal, of young teenagers who have stayed in hostel accommodation in Stornoway as part of their education being referred to by non Gaelic speaking townies, almost affectionately as 'the Natties' (Natives.) In the Uists children from the more rural districts are referred to even by other local children as 'Crofter' Kids. Gaelic programmes and music are also prefaced by the children in schools with the word 'crofter.' Although all in the mode of good natured banter these terms carry message to the Gaelic minorities. The underlying stigma present here relates not just to language orientation but to the fact that crofters are a socially inferior species, not able to sustain a living financially without external support in the form of grants.

Schools in the Western Isles participating in GME have had to re-educate pupils out of a mindset in which they were stigmatised as being less modern and hence inferior to their English-speaking peers. At the same time schools are aware of the risks in creating Gaelic

ghettos which divide the schools into two ethnic groups. This is not the reason for the promotion of Gaelic only within restricted contexts in the secondary schools but there is certainly not a positive discrimination in providing staffing levels to allow Gaelic medium in discrete subjects nor is there any real evidence of policies to carry over the Gaelic thrust of primary school units into the secondary.

There is also a tendency for minority languages to become negatively stigmatised in the sense that they promote the kind of solidarity that tends to make others feel excluded. Generally however the minority language can also symbolise a lower social status in comparison with the majority language and must be abandoned in order to achieve social mobility.<sup>197</sup> This has created a defensive psychology which has led to the phenomenon known as the 'etiquette of accommodation.'<sup>198</sup> This has also been observed by Kathryn Woolard in her research into Catalan speakers in Barcelona. In this environment, Catalan speakers consider that 'It is proper to speak Catalan only to those who are known to be Catalan.'<sup>199</sup> Woolard also observes that it is considered impolite and embarrassing to speak Catalan within earshot of non-Catalan speakers, even when they are not involved in the conversation at all. A nearly identical situation can be found among many Gaelic speakers with regard to Gaelic, and young Gaelic speakers learn these cultural 'rules' at an early age, as quote from a pupil demonstrates:

*We don't like using Gàidhlig if it is going to shut people out. It is not polite.*

The teenage years while being regarded as a period of potential identity confusion can at the same time be a period where young people can be searching for some unification of tradition. The words of the psychologist Erik Erikson still hold true:

It is the ideological potential of a society that speaks most clearly to the adolescent who is eager to be affirmed by his peers, to be confirmed by his teachers, and to be inspired by worthwhile ways of life.<sup>200</sup>

<sup>197</sup> Fernandez, James W. *Persuasions and Performances: The Play of Tropes in Culture*, 1986: 132-137

<sup>198</sup> Gal, S. *Language Shift, Social Determinants of Linguistic Change in Bilingual Austria*, 1979: 165-166

<sup>199</sup> Woolard, K. A. *Double Talk: Bilingualism and the Politics of Ethnicity in Catalonia*, 1989, 69

<sup>200</sup> Erikson E. *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, 1968: 130

Currently this ideological statement appears to have been swamped by the apparent need that young people in the Western Isles have to shed as much of their cultural heritage as possible in order to conform to a perceived norm of 'Scottish Englishness.' Part of this is a natural tendency of teenagers to define themselves in terms of what they are not, e.g. not a 'nerd,' 'anorak,' or 'Teuchter.'

Sadly the conclusions of this and the other chapters in my research where I sought the views of the client group and delivery groups indicate that contemporaneously with the language loss of the last decades there has been a heritage and history loss in the Gaelic heartland of the islands. This has resulted in the demise of the sense of identity normally associated with having a mother tongue that is different from the dominant language. Some children in the interviews I conducted identified the duality of culture that Gaelic had provided and could identify cultural benefits of having the language but this was tempered with an understanding that in school the rightful place of Gaelic was in the classroom.

The strong bond between language and culture and identity has not been packaged as part of a Gaelic education philosophy. Indeed the philosophy of *why* they are studying through the medium of Gaelic has not really been presented to pupils in any formalised way.

### ***Regenerative Approaches***

There have been success stories where language regeneration initiatives have been firmly founded in the local community and have been expressions of the will of the indigenous group. One innovative project stands out as an example of the grass roots demand for Irish Medium education. This was the Shaws Road project which was set up in 1986 by a group of parents who believed that by building a new Gaelic speaking community within an area of Belfast they could start up a new school similar to the *Gaeltacht* Immersion Schools in the Republic of Ireland.<sup>201</sup> Recent research has shown that 'in Northern Ireland, the language is experiencing a revival that is sustainable; one that expresses itself not only in

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<sup>201</sup> Maguire, G. *Our Own Language*, 1991: 37

numbers of speakers, but also in terms of the status of the language and the institutional support for it.<sup>202</sup>

There seem to be lessons for Gaelic speaking parents in Scotland to make the same strong demand for language and to be insistent on maintaining Gaelic dominant communities in their heartlands. To date the only strong case presented by parents for a secondary Gaelic medium school has emanated from Glasgow parents in their pursuit of a follow through Gaelic education from nursery to primary then to secondary.

The work of Nettle and Romaine (2000) on endangered languages brings in to prominence two key ideas namely that language preservation is ecologically desirable as language loss contributes to the degradation of the environment.<sup>203</sup> They also affirm the view that there is much that can be done if there is the will to do it in the locality:

International, regional and national policies that empower indigenous peoples and promote sustainable development are the key to preserving local eco systems essential to language maintenance... As the environmental slogans tell us, think globally, act locally.<sup>204</sup>

Some of the case studies highlighted in their work point to the value of operating at the heart of the indigenous community and the fact that no amount of input can compensate for language lost by not utilising the home as the primary domain of learning and reinforcement.

One case study demonstrates an innovative approach capitalising on the notion of intergenerational transmission of language which was undertaken by the Passamaquoddy Indians in New England. There the efforts focussed on a master apprentice language learning programme pairing young person with an older person to pass on everyday language. Of particular interest also were the Language nests (*Kohanga Re*) for pre-school immersion based on New Zealand and now serves about 14, 000 children. This model led to a vertical immersion programme which needed a change in legislation to allow

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<sup>202</sup> Mac Giolla Chríost, D, and Aitchison, J. *Area*, 1998, 30. 4. 303.

<sup>203</sup> Nettle, D and Romaine, S. *Vanishing Voices: the extinction of the world's languages*: 2000: 16

Hawaiian medium education in public schools. In 1989 a state supported agency was set up to support the language under the auspices of the University of Hawaii and in 1996 the first state immersion school was set up. However there is evidence that the first cohort of Hawaiian pupils have begun to lose fluency due to lack of reinforcement in the home front. Citing the mixed results of the Irish experience of revitalising language Nettle and Romaine suggest that 'There is an important distinction to be made between learning a language in the artificial environment of the classroom and transmitting it in the natural environment of the home.'<sup>205</sup>

By contrast, in parts of Scotland parents viewed the Gaelic Medium initiatives like any other educational initiative as being a provision parachuted in from some educational heaven where all the solutions were already pre ordained. There is a local tendency for parents to defer to the supposed superior knowledge of educationalists and this can perhaps be explained by the fact that statistically fewer of the parents come from the professional classes in the Western Isles. The p qual ratio (percentage of parents in the professional classes) as defined in HMIE reports is 22% nationally in Scotland, but 11% in Lewis and only 5% in the Uists.

Joshua Fishman in *Reversing Language Shift Revisited* argued that a threatened language would need to be supported by

A linkage system that starts with those adult functions and institutions that are prior to and preparatory for schooling for children. This linkage system must be one that continues on to adolescent and young adult functions after and following upon schooling for children.<sup>206</sup>

Here he is talking about the need to promote the language in environments beyond the school as preservation of a threatened language requires to be 'linked to home-family-

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<sup>204</sup> Nettle, D., and Romaine, S. *Vanishing Voices: the extinction of the world's languages*: 2000:177

<sup>205</sup> Ibid: 186

<sup>206</sup> Fishman, J. A. *Can Threatened Languages be Saved?: Reversing Language Shift, Revisited: A 21st Century Perspective*, 2001: 13-15

neighbourhood-community functions.<sup>207</sup> This was an issue raised by some informants in Chapter 7.

As was stated in that same chapter there is evidence that support systems have grown for Gaelic-medium pupils and these were identified as cultural events, mòds, *fèisean*, Gaelic clubs, TV programmes and so on. Their existence however is on the basis that communities will provide from within their own reserves of volunteers. Pupils do not have these add-ons as part of any global plan for their development in using Gaelic in domains external to the classroom.

My research findings in the section on pupil interviews showed that pupils had a tendency to lack confidence in using Gaelic outwith the structured set up and support system of classroom use. They seemed sceptical that Gaelic could have a public role even within the school for such things as announcements believing that it may be as baffling to the hearers as the use of French. Their attitude to Gaelic outwith school was that it would be acceptable in certain limited contexts such as working on crofts or for religious services or in the media – although some regarded the TV programmes as being suitable only for younger children. Beyond the island they had no awareness of the use of Gaelic in any public role. As one pupil said:

*When I go to university no one will use it at all*

The proposals of the *Gàidhlig* Act seem to focus on the developing public role of Gaelic as providing some sort of panacea to obvert the death of the language. Language specialists have outlined effective strategies for supporting endangered languages, Fishman, (2001) , Crystal, (2000), Nettle and Romaine, (2000) and Wright (2004) There is a developing view however that giving a language official status will not in itself be the salvation of it unless other measures are in place. Nettle and Romaine suggest that ‘conferring power on people’, would have greater effect.<sup>208</sup> Wright points to the importance of promoting bilingualism as a ‘prestige activity rather than a practice for the powerless.’<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Fishman, J. A. *Can Threatened Languages be Saved?: Reversing Language Shift, Revisited: A 21st Century Perspective*, 2001: 13-15

<sup>208</sup> Nettle D and Romaine S. *Vanishing Voices*, 2000: 40

<sup>209</sup> Wright S. *Language Policy and Language Planning*, 2004: 247



The setting up of The Gaelic Board, *Bord na Gàidhlig*, to address the developmental needs of Gaelic has been designed to promote a feeling that something is being done at national level, but in a way that will include the views of localities. Crystal makes a direct parallel between the notion of ownership and stewardship.

The saving of a language demands commitment, a shared sense of responsibility, a clear sense of direction, and a wide range of special skills.<sup>210</sup>

The work of the Gaelic board seems to be in keeping with these aims but is this too little too late? The decline of Gaelic in Scotland as a whole apart from the restricted, almost formalised use in schools, has contributed to a sense of futility about its use. If there is no place for it outwith restricted contexts such as indigenous industries of fishing, fish farming and crofting (themselves on the wane) then it is unlikely that young people themselves will create new contexts from within their homes or schools. As Spolsky has posited:

Language management remains a dream until it is implemented, and its potential for implementation depends in large measure on its congruity with the practices and ideology of the community.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Crystal D. *Language Death*, 2000: 154

<sup>211</sup> Spolsky, B. *Language Policy*, 2000, 218

## Chapter 9 – Conclusions and Recommendations

### *Client Groups and Delivery Groups – A Final Word*

In this concluding chapter I present a brief résumé of the research findings. This represents the hopes and aspirations and concerns of my informants and encapsulates some of the culture and identity issues that this research has explored. The actual lived experience of Gaelic-medium education recounted and explored through this thesis draws attention to a variety of concerns about the future viability of Gaelic and the role it has in consolidating a sense of local and national identity. At the same time the research shows the commitment to the Gaelic language that has been made by the first generation, their parents and those who have had a role in the education process.

### **Views of Pupils**

The data from Chapter 4 of this research show many positive attitudes and experiences which I have summarised as follows

In questions 11 to 17 in Chapter 4, the pupils identified an improvement in their broad language skills in reading and writing and had an increased awareness of the importance of accuracy in spelling and grammar. Compulsory assessment of their skills tended to colour their views about the worth of Gaelic. Island children tend to be shy and the speaking assessments of language study are challenging. One pupil put it very poignantly when asked about the pros and cons:

*Talking is one of my downfalls.*

In their perception of Gaelic in the wider community (Q21 - 27) the cohort noted the following:

- They are in general happy with Gaelic and score high enough marks in the early years of secondary to give them the confidence to continue with it.
- They do not however speak it as a rule to other pupils outwith the classroom. They also noted that Gaelic is not used in an official capacity in their schools outwith the classroom.
- Although Gaelic was not seen as an exclusive marker of identity they did say that Gaelic made them feel more Scottish.
- Some pupils also thought that there were important cultural benefits to be derived from Gaelic and they had an awareness that Gaelic would open doors in the job market.
- Pupils felt that in secondary Gaelic was confined to the domain of the classroom yet they saw Gaelic as having relevance beyond the classroom as a language for the Highlands and for Scotland.

Analysis of the interview data yields the following points:

- In GM pupils felt special but in secondary with Gaelic relegated to the status of an ordinary school subject outwith the domain of the classroom they were aware of being a minority and felt pressurised to abandon Gaelic.
- Fluency in Gaelic had helped them studying other languages and they had positive attitudes to the study of literature and an awareness that the world of Gaelic could provide them with viable career opportunities.
- Pupils also had an awareness of the duality of culture endowed by Gaelic but felt powerless to save Gaelic.

It is interesting to note that within the domains of Gaelic use that have been created for children and teenagers, social environments such as *Stratagan* clubs, Gaelic choirs, and in their locality, their homes, churches and so on, they feel comfortable in using their language but their perception that it should not be used in the social environment of school, represents what Bourdieu (1991) may have described as a *méconnaissance* (misrecognition) assuming that 'the greater value accorded to the dominant language and culture to be 'natural' rather than a socially and politically constructed phenomenon.'<sup>212</sup> This error is of course not something that pupils have much control over as they are not in a position to challenge norms but the fact that parents accept the very minimalist steps that are taken to widen the domains of use within schools suggests that there more work to be done in utilising school as a Gaelic language environment and that parents could be working more closely with schools to suggest strategies and perhaps even take on a role in using Gaelic to support extra curricular activities.

### Views of Parents

Looking again at the aspirations of my survey group, the parents felt that their children were gaining a lot by opting for Gaelic medium-education. A sound education, the preservation of Gaelic and the cultural benefits derived from Gaelic were identified as key factors in their choice of Gaelic-medium. The strength of their feeling on these subjects has been noted in Chapter 6 and in Appendix D. It is interesting to study a selection of their comments in response to the question, 'What were your reasons for choosing Gaelic?

*Gaelic-medium provides a high standard of education*

*They (the children) were fluent Gaelic speakers. This would have changed very quickly had they gone into the English medium system.*

*I chose Gaelic-medium because I wanted my children to help preserve the Gaelic language. It is their heritage*

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<sup>212</sup> Bourdieu, P. *Language and Symbolic Power*. 1991 cited in May S, *Language and Minority Rights*, 2001:310

These remarks display a high awareness of the essential aims, both explicit and implicit, of Gaelic-medium education and show clearly that there is a desire from within the community to preserve their heritage. Perhaps what is lacking is an appropriate forum for their views to be expressed. Although individual schools have parent associations there is no regional forum for parents of children in the Gaelic sector. It may be worth noting that support of the kind some parents were seeking has been offered in certain minority language revival programmes. Parents in the study of Navajo Indian children in North America for example were encouraged to take an active part in supporting children and were invited to watch demonstrations of teaching approaches.

The fact that teachers could and did conduct such demonstrations with whichever children happened to be there on a parents evening may have done more than anything else make the program credible.<sup>213</sup>

There is no similar support arrangement as yet and the parent support organisation, *Comunn nam Pàrant* tends to operate at a distance and local issues are not dealt with at secondary level except in the sense that parents can make an approach to schools if they have a concern. Often in small communities this is difficult. It would also be useful to have a strong parent group to highlight the positive aspects of Gaelic-medium and to persuade others of its advantages. A scheme recently introduced to give support in the family setting at home to parents who are learners aims to improve the confidence of parents who have no real language background in Gaelic in supporting their children in GME. This is in keeping with the findings of recent research which celebrates home language and cultures as 'potential resources of learning' <sup>214</sup>

What of the parents who did not choose Gaelic-medium? Was their decision based on a conscious desire to reject a culture? It seems more likely that their knowledge of the benefits of Gaelic is still sparse and they are perhaps unaware of the cultural and heritage advantages cited in the report commissioned by the Scottish Parliament in 1999. To

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<sup>213</sup> Arviso M., and Holm W. 'A Navajo Immersion Programme in Fort Defiance Arizona', *The Green Book of Language Revitalisation in Practice*, Hale K and Hinton L eds., 2001:211

<sup>214</sup> Chow, P., and Cummins J. 2003:33, cited in Swain M., and Lapkin, S. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 2005: vol. 15: 2, 182

support his plea for the needs of Gaelic, J. A. MacPherson, who chaired the task force who compiled the report referred to the need to see language as a magic key that would bring access to a richness of culture.

Chacun recite toutefois que la supreme révélation du genie national, la clef magique qui donne accès aux plus hautes richesses de la culture, c'est la langue.<sup>215</sup>

Clearly the riches cannot be embraced by Scotland as a whole unless the indigenous language speakers of Gaelic take a more assertive and confident role in the area of Gaelic language regeneration. This is particularly crucial in the arena of Gaelic education.

Although schools play a role in preserving the language and culture, in the secondary sector this idea is an implicit theme rather than an overt strategy. Mods, *fèisean*, concerts and so on happen due to the efforts of a dedicated few in the system and in the local community. Further initiatives on language planning and development are required to support the efforts of teachers and dedicated parents. There should also be a national overview of Gaelic development projects, to ensure that their aims actively promote language revitalisation.

### **Views of Educationalists**

In Chapter 7 of this research most of the respondents did not acknowledge that the schools had a responsibility to promote ethnicity and identity issues as part of a more Gaelic ethos in schools. Some thought that the ethos was there but did not identify its existence significantly. Teachers did feel that children had difficulty in speaking and writing with technical accuracy due to the lack of opportunities to speak the language in informal contexts. One of the respondents from the field of education stressed that, '*language planning is societal*,' and that children will learn better if there is a '*naturalistic speech community*.' As communities become less Gaelic speaking the role of the school in preserving the language is heightened. A recognition of secondary school as a domain of

preservation is vital to the support of secondary pupils. This should be explicitly stated in the mission statements and development plans of schools. In this way the societal norm of English dominance would not be replicated so slavishly in schools. Although not describing parallel situations, studies into bilingual dual language programmes in the USA, by Delgado - Larroco (1998) and in Canada by Cleghorn and Genesee, (1984) have shown that,

When decision making and dual language planning in bilingual schools are based on pedagogical factors without sustained explicit attention to societally based inter group factors, teachers tend to recreate in school the same intergroup relationships that exist outside school.<sup>216</sup>

Educationalists therefore should understand how to 'counteract the centrifugal societal forces that act to maintain intergroup prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping in school.'<sup>217</sup>

Some respondents emphasised the need for the provision of non-classroom contexts for the promotion of Gaelic within schools and for these contexts to be supported and extended beyond school. This is supported by a broad spectrum of those involved in the research of issues of cultural identity and language revitalisation. Crystal, (2000) in addition to the six postulates previously mentioned for language revitalisation, refers to the nine factors outlined by Yamamoto (1998b) some of which include; the creation of bilingual/bicultural education programmes, the involvement of the speech community as a whole, the promotion of a strong sense of ethnic identity within the endangered community.

The necessity of promoting valid contexts for the use of Gaelic was also suggested as essential in the research of Morag MacNeil and Bob Stradling. Both in the 1993 report by Morag MacNeil, *Parental Experiences of Gaelic Medium Education*, and in later in the

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<sup>215</sup> Groulx, L. cited in MacPherson, J. A. et al, *Revitalising Gaelic a National Asset*, 1999

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/heritage/gtfr-00.asp>

<sup>216</sup> Genesee, F. 1999, Bilingual education programs: a cross cultural perspective. *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 55No 4. 665-685

<sup>217</sup> Ibid: vol. 55No 4. 665-685

*Home and Community Report*, parents of GM pupils wanted schools to have more liaison with the community as:

Enhanced exposure to Gaelic in the home and community not only supports and reinforces school based Gaelic-medium learning but also extends the child's use of Gaelic in it to a wider range of language domains. More needs to be done to help parents support their children's Gaelic language development, to expose children to a critical mass of Gaelic at home and in the community and to encourage children to think of Gaelic as a language which can be used outside the setting of the Gaelic-medium classroom.<sup>218</sup>

The report of the taskforce appointed by the Scottish Executive in 1999 to consider the future of Gaelic drew attention to the limitations to corpus planning in the area of Gaelic development. The group identified Education as a key area of future development but drew attention to the existing constraints facing GME in terms of lack of numbers both of pupils and teachers. Furthermore:

The educational deficit is compounded by a shortfall in the Inspectorate, by lack of training and in-service provision, and by lack of awareness and promotion of the value of bilingual education.<sup>219</sup>

The report suggested that 'if Gaelic is to survive it must receive a level of support comparable to what Welsh and Irish are receiving now.'<sup>220</sup> The report further suggests that 'securing and promoting Gaelic in the heartland must be a key objective.'<sup>221</sup> There is no doubt however that the revitalisation posited by the taskforce requires not just a national initiative but a desire strongly expressed from within the heartland in favour of the preservation the language.

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<sup>218</sup> Stradling, R and MacNeil, M. *Home and Community Report*, 2000: 3

<sup>219</sup> MacPherson, J. A. et al, *Revitalising Gaelic a National Asset*, 1999  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/heritage/gtfr-00.asp>

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*



## **Conclusions**

An essential requirement of Gaelic-medium is to capitalise more on its successes as part of the process of marketing the benefits to would-be clients of the system. At present little is known of the progress through the system of pupils. There has been no tracking of individuals to ascertain their success in higher education and employment compared to English-medium counterparts. It would be beneficial to make a comparison of this type.

In my own role as a Principal Teacher of Guidance responsible for assisting senior pupils with university applications it became clear to me that pupils who had come through Gaelic medium had a far better portfolio of achievements and experiences than the other mainstream pupils. Apart from their academic successes they had a broader range of experience in terms of the performing arts and in leadership roles through working with Gaelic youth groups, *fèisean*, etc. They were therefore better placed and more confident in interview situations whether or not their career aspirations were in the Gaelic world. This is confirmed by the evidence from Chapter 4 (Q18 - 20) which outline the benefits identified by pupils in my survey.

There is therefore a strong argument that Gaelic-medium education produces a more rounded individual in terms of the broader aims of education even though at secondary level the Gaelic curriculum in itself is not directed to this end. What is anomalous though is that pupils are relatively unaware of the benefits until it comes almost to the moment of departure from school. The 'uncoolness' of Gaelic has been completely internalised by many pupils and for those who feel otherwise they opt for silence on the matter – except perhaps when asked to give their views in a research study. My research findings as demonstrated in the pupil questionnaire and in the interview material, chapters 4 and 5, did show however that pupils had a sense of the importance of their Gaelic heritage and felt a sense of pride in their status as native speakers. In terms of their identity referencing 30% saw themselves equally as Scot and Gael. On the subject of their perception of Gaelic being a peripheral language that no one would speak on the mainland, or use in university it is interesting to note that this is a false impression given that there is a strong sense of

vibrancy in the uptake of Gaelic by mainland children the evidence of which can be seen in the number of mainland schools participating in and being successful in Gaelic events such as the national Gaelic debate. Pupils of this age are also more likely to form contacts with others and take advantage of rapid systems of communication. Crystal (2000) has noted the role that technology has played in changing the whole notion of peripherality. The rapidity of electronic communication changes the whole focus of the idea of heartland as people speaking Gaelic can be much more in touch with each other consolidating a sense of identity and culture which need not be based on loyalty to any particular Gaelic speaking locality. Whether these positive indicators result in producing viable Gaelic speech localities remains to be seen.

Parents in my study had made a wholehearted commitment to Gaelic and when asked to identify further support measures they identified several mechanisms which would enable them to participate more fully in supporting their children through Gaelic-medium (see Appendix D). In my findings parents requested initiatives such as:

*Community networks of supportive Gaelic speakers willing to assist Gaelic-medium pupils who have non Gaelic speaking parents.*

A programme of support for parents is essential, especially for those who are not from a Gaelic background. The type of support mentioned is already being progressed under the auspices of CNSA and the Gaelic Board on the mainland but it would also be beneficial in the Western Isles as the number of incoming non Gaelic speakers is rising. A report on the needs of Gaelic-medium pupils and parents published in 2000 concluded that

More needs to be done to help parents support their children's Gaelic language development, to expose children to a critical mass of Gaelic in the home and in the community and to encourage children to think of Gaelic as a language which can and should be used outside the setting of the Gaelic-medium classroom.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Stradling R., and MacNeil M. *Home and Community*, 2000: 3

Materials such as the ones developed for Irish medium schools mentioned in the *Home and Community Report* (e.g. *Basic Irish for Parents*) would be really beneficial for non native parents who wish to support their children in Gaelic.

In a study of the language perspectives of Scottish students Margaret Nicolson concludes that:

The ability to share another outlook on the world through other forms of thought, literature and lexis is one which can only enhance tolerant relationships between different cultural groups.<sup>223</sup>

This ability was recognised and expressed in one way or another by the different groups interviewed in my survey and encapsulated most neatly by one pupil who said:

*Studying Gaelic has given me two cultures*

This statement evokes the sentiment expressed by May, (2001) that ‘the recognition of our cultural and historical situatedness should not set the limits of ethnicity and nationality, nor act to undermine the legitimacy of other equally valid forms of identity.’<sup>224</sup> The important role that Gaelic education has, apart from its clear cut role in language preservation is to provide that perspective on identity which enables young people to accommodate to the dominant language without succumbing to it. However, as Edwards (1994) notes, schools need to have the support of the rest of society as ‘educational legitimisation is not empowerment.’<sup>225</sup>

In terms of state intervention on behalf of Gaelic revitalisation account has to be taken of the variety of contexts in which the Gaelic language as a politicised entity is competing with other claims for funding. Under the umbrella of education much has been done to promote Gaelic-medium education within the Western Isles and Scotland, but in putting the onus on parents to prioritise and articulate their own language needs and rights is

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<sup>223</sup> Nicolson M. “Language and Who We Are,” *Scottish Educational Review*, vol. 35, no. 2, 134

<sup>224</sup> May, S. *Language and Minority Rights*, 2001: 315

<sup>225</sup> Edwards, J. *Multilingualism*, 1994: 188

assuming a 'collective awareness' which communities with a history of disempowerment are unlikely to have.<sup>226</sup> It is fair to say also that the globalising influences are changing the concept of ethnic heartlands to an interpretation of Scotland as cultural mosaic in which the Gaelic speaking people in the islands and have become slightly disembedded, perhaps no longer perceived as or feeling that they represent the real heartland. This can be seen in the tendency to react to Gaelic initiatives from outwith the heartland in the sense of catching up rather than being at the cutting edge. For example, the Western Isles is only just beginning to consider the implementation of Gaelic-medium schools rather than units within schools. In contrast Glasgow is forging ahead with plans to extend the primary school facility to a full three to post sixteen Gaelic-medium facility.

The branding of Gaelic and its related cultural symbols can help to keep the concept of a Gaelic identity in the public eye. There is a danger however of Gaelic being seen as part of a drive to promote nothing more than a 'culture fest' mentality in which the needs of the language are swamped under other less urgent agendas namely the citizenship brief or the tourist promotion brief. The need to see language diversity as something more complex than mere conservation for political reasons was addressed by Kalantzis et al:

We must be careful not to limit our view of social function in such a way that tokens or gestures seem adequate, in the hope, perhaps, that regardless of the linguistic outcome, some psychological sense of self-esteem or tolerance of others will come simply through institutional approval of a language.<sup>227</sup>

In a world which is becoming increasingly multicultural and where lack of insight into and tolerance for others is causing global threat it would be heartening if our young people could identify their Gaelic language as being concordant with English speaking culture, complementing and enriching Scottishness. It was indeed heartening to hear in the pupil interview situation the 'laid back' approach to language acquisition as expressed by one pupil:

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<sup>226</sup> Ager D. *Motivation in Language Planning and Language Policy*, 2001: 159

<sup>227</sup> Kalantzis, M. et al, *Minority Languages and Dominant Culture*, 1989: 28

*There were no problems. You learn English anyway.*

This comment was endorsed by many pupils as was evidenced in the numbers who were happy with their choice of Gaelic in secondary. In supporting Gaelic in this way pupils have been the guides and educators of the somewhat sceptical generation that preceded them.

### ***Final Recommendations***

In making final recommendations I would suggest the following:

- A greater emphasis on the follow through benefits of Gaelic-medium from primary to the end of secondary.
- Measures at secondary level to link the teaching of Gaelic with a sense of the importance and vulnerability of the language and culture, both for Gaelic and non Gaelic speaking pupils.
- The creation of more support structures for parents, especially those who are not fluent in Gaelic.
- Further research to make comparative studies of GM pupils post primary.
- Development of groups to promote Gaelic for children in contexts outwith school.
- Better TV, radio and literature for teenage GM pupils.

Gaelic speaking children have the opportunity to be ambassadors of a heritage that is rich and worthwhile and it is essential that we study and evaluate the process and manner of their learning. Surely we owe it to them, the first generation and those that are to follow to preserve and sustain their language birthright. If we enable them to pass on, '*Buaidh an deagh labhraidh*', the grace of goodly speech then they might indeed become the future guardians of a priceless inheritance and we can say to them with conviction in the words of the Cantic of Graces:

*Is tu sonas gach ní eibhinn,*

You are the joy of all joyous things

*Is tu solus gath na greine,*

You are the light of the beam of the sun

*Is tu dorus flath na feile,*

You are the door of the chief of hospitality

*Is tu corra reul an iuil.*

You are the surpassing star of guidance.

## **Appendix A: Pupil Questionnaire**

### **QUESTIONNAIRE**

For Pupils who have experienced Gaelic Medium Education

**SCHOOL:** .....

**SCHOOL YEAR:** .....

**MALE/FEMALE:** .....

**Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Your answers will help me in completing a research project on Gaelic Medium Education.**

**Please place in envelope provided and seal the envelope.**

### **Questionnaire**

For Pupils who have experienced Gaelic Medium Education.

#### **Language Background information**

- 1) Which of the following best describes your home experience of Gaelic?
- a) Two parents/guardians who are fluent in Gaelic
  - b) One parent/guardian who is fluent
  - c) Parents/guardians who are learners
  - d) Parents/guardians have no Gaelic

Tick a box.

#### **Primary School and Home**

- 2) When you started primary school were you able to speak in
- a) Gaelic and English
  - b) Gaelic only
  - c) English only
  - d) Can't remember

Tick a box.

- 3) In which year of primary school was teaching in English introduced?

P1      P2      P3      P4      P5      P6      P7

(Can't remember)

Tick a box.

- 4) How would you rate your own ability now in the elements of each language?

<b>Gaelic</b>	Very Good	Good	OK	Not Good
Reading				
Writing				
Talking				

<b>English</b>	Very Good	Good	OK	Not Good
Reading				
Writing				
Talking				



5) By the end of your primary school education were you more competent in

- a) Gaelic                      b) English                      c) About the same in both

Tick a box.

6) What language did you usually speak in the playground in primary school?

- a) Mostly English              b) Mostly Gaelic              c) Both equally

Tick a box.

7 At home did you speak

- a) Mostly English              b) Mostly Gaelic              c) Both equally

Tick a box.

8 Did your parents prefer you to speak Gaelic at home?

- Yes                                      No

Tick a box.

### **Transition To Secondary**

9 Has the extent to which you use Gaelic or English changed as you have grown older?

If "No" go to Q12.

If "Yes" please tick the statements you agree with.

- a) I speak more Gaelic than I used to
- b) I speak more English than I used to
- c) I read more in Gaelic than I used to
- d) I read more English than Gaelic for pleasure
- e) I write more Gaelic than I did before
- f) I write more English than Gaelic for pleasure

- 10 Which of the following best describes the reason for these changes?  
You can tick as many as you like.

- a) English is the main language spoken around me
- b) I have more opportunities to speak Gaelic
- c) I find that books are more difficult in Gaelic
- d) I am more likely to read for pleasure in English
- e) My Gaelic fluency has improved as there is more written work in Gaelic
- f) At home there is more emphasis on improving English
- g) Most of the school subjects are taught in English
- h) Gaelic is not used much in the playground or outside the classroom.

Tick a box or boxes.

- 11 Write down in your own words how coming to secondary has made a difference to the amount of Gaelic that you speak, read and write.

- a) Speaking
- b) Reading
- c) Writing

### **Progress in Secondary School**

- 12 How do you rate Gaelic in terms of difficulty compared to other subjects you are currently studying?

Arrange your subjects on the line below in order of difficulty starting with the easiest.

Easy

Difficult

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13 Why did you choose Gaelic as a subject at the end of S2? Tick the box which best describes your reason:

- a) I liked the subject
  - b) I got high marks in S2 assessment
  - c) There are career prospects in Gaelic related jobs
  - d) I was influenced by my parents
  - e) I preferred it to other language options on the timetable
  - f) Other reasons
- Mention the reasons if you chose (f).

14 Are you happy that you chose Gaelic as a subject at the end of S2?

Yes

No

15 Are you still happy with your choice of Gaelic?  
Give reasons why or why not.

16 Which aspects of studying Gaelic as a school subject do you enjoy the most and why? e.g. Talking, writing.

17 Thinking about Q16, please write a few sentences mentioning anything you dislike about studying Gaelic in school.

- 18 Having been through the Gaelic medium system what do you feel Gaelic has done for you?  
Respond to the following. Tick one or more or none.

- a) Gaelic makes me feel more Scottish
- b) Gaelic gives me more job opportunities
- c) Gaelic makes me proud of being a Gael
- d) Gaelic has made me better at languages
- e) Gaelic has made me more aware of the history of the Highlands and Islands
- f) Gaelic has given me a better social life

- 19 How important have the following been to you in your Gaelic education?

Very Fairly

- a) Gaining fluency in the written language
- b) Learning about the history of the Gaelic speaking people
- c) Learning about Gaelic folklore (poetry, songs, customs)
- d) Developing an extensive vocabulary
- e) Becoming aware of your identity as a Gael
- f) Learning a system of grammar
- g) Being able to express thoughts and ideas with the same level of fluency as in English (being bilingual)
- h) Enjoying Gaelic TV, Radio Music, Performing Acts
- i) Being more effective as a member of a Gaelic Community

- 20 In primary school Gaelic Medium pupils formed a distinct group. What experiences have you had in secondary school of Gaelic groupings:

- a) Being in a fluent Gaelic class
- b) Studying another subject or subjects through the medium of Gaelic
- c) Being in a Gaelic school club
- d) Being a member of a Gaelic school choir
- e) Other

21 Do you hear Gaelic being spoken in your school outwith the classroom?

a) By other pupils

rarely      regularly      quite often      very often

b) By teaching staff (not the Gaelic teachers)

rarely      regularly      quite often      very often

c) By members of staff who are not teachers e.g. cafeteria staff, janitors

rarely      regularly      quite often      very often

d) By official visitors

rarely      regularly      quite often      very often

e) By visiting parents

rarely      regularly      quite often      very often

f) By Gaelic teachers

rarely      regularly      quite often      very often

g) In Announcements

rarely      regularly      quite often      very often

h) In Assemblies

rarely      regularly      quite often      very often

**Gaelic in the Wider community**

22 Outwith school, which of the following Gaelic activities do you take part in?  
You can tick more than one.

- |    |   |           |        |       |  |
|----|---|-----------|--------|-------|--|
| a) | Conversation with your friends  |           |        |       |  |
|    | regularly   | sometimes | rarely | never |  |
| b) | Conversation with parents/guardians                                   |           |        |       |  |
|    | regularly   | sometimes | rarely | never |  |
| c) | Conversation with brothers and sisters                                |           |        |       |  |
|    | regularly   | sometimes | rarely | never |  |
| d) | Reading books, magazines and newspapers                               |           |        |       |  |
|    | regularly   | sometimes | rarely | never |  |
| e) | Listening to Gaelic radio   |           |        |       |  |
|    | regularly   | sometimes | rarely | never |  |
| f) | Watching TV programmes in Gaelic                                      |           |        |       |  |
|    | regularly   | sometimes | rarely | never |  |
| g) | Using Gaelic in working with adults, e.g. croft work, babysitting etc |           |        |       |  |
|    | regularly   | sometimes | rarely | never |  |
| h) | Prayer or participating in Gaelic church services                     |           |        |       |  |
|    | regularly   | sometimes | rarely | never |  |

23 Do you find Gaelic TV/radio programmes are useful mainly for

- a) entertainment
- b) study

Mention the programmes that you have found most interesting to your age group and say why you like them.

24 Here are some statements about Gaelic. Tick the box next to the statement or statements that are closest to your own viewpoint.

- a) Gaelic is a language for the Highlands and Islands
- b) Gaelic is a language for the whole of Scotland
- c) Gaelic is a language that is dying out
- d) Many more natives are speaking Gaelic than before
- e) Gaelic is a language that people in Scotland want to learn
- f) Gaelic is only useful as a language for the croft
- g) Gaelic could be used in all aspects of life:  
work, business, pleasure

25 If Gaelic is to survive which of the following would help?

- a) Giving more publicity to Gaelic
- b) Having more Gaelic taught in schools
- c) More TV/Radio
- d) Giving more support for parents of pupils  
in Gaelic Medium
- e) More Government funding
- f) By having Official Language status for Gaelic
- g) Other ways (write your own ideas)

Tick a box or boxes.

26 Which of the following best describes the way in which you see yourself?  
Tick one box.

- a) As a Scot
- b) As a Gael and then a Scot
- c) As a Gael only
- d) My Scottish and Gaelic identities are of equal value to me
- e) I do not see identity as being important

27 Finally, do you have any other comments you wish to make on your experience of Gaelic Medium education. Please use the space below.

## Appendix B: Pupil Questionnaire Data

### Question 1

Which of the following best describes your home experience of Gaelic?

- a Two parents / guardians who are fluent in Gaelic
- b One parent who is fluent
- c Parents / guardians who are learners
- d Parents / guardians who have no Gaelic

Response	Both Fluent	One Fluent	Learners	No Gaelic	Total
L	25	8	0	0	33
H	4	2	0	0	6
U	27	16	0	0	43
B	2	3	1	0	6
Total	58	29	1	0	88
Percent	66	33	1	0	

### Responses by Gender

Response	Both Fluent	One Fluent	Learners	No Gaelic	Total
M	22	12	0	0	34
F	36	17	1	0	54
Total	58	29	1	0	88
% M	65	35	0	0	
% F	67	31	2	0	



## Question 2

When you started primary school were you able to speak in

- a Gaelic and English
- b Gaelic Only
- c English only
- d Can't remember

Response	Both	Gaelic	English	Can't remember	Total
L	20	7	4	2	33
H	6	0	0	0	6
U	22	7	9	5	43
B	4	1	0	1	6
Total	52	15	13	8	88
Percent	59	17	15	9	

### Responses by Gender

Response	Both	Gaelic	English	Can't remember	Total
M	22	7	4	1	34
F	30	8	9	7	54
Total	52	15	13	8	88
% M	65	21	12	3	
% F	56	15	17	13	

### Question 3

In which year of primary school was teaching in English introduced?

P1 P2 P3 P4 P5 P6 P7 Can't remember

Response	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	CR	NR	Total
L	0	0	17	12	1	3	0	33
H	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	6
U	5	2	12	8	2	11	3	43
B	3	2	0	1	0	0	0	6
Total	8	4	35	21	3	14	3	88
Percent	9	5	40	24	3	16	3	

#### Responses by Gender

Response	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	CR	NR	Total
M	2	0	16	8	2	5	1	34
F	6	4	19	13	1	9	2	54
Total	8	4	35	21	3	14	3	88
% M	6	0	47	24	6	15	3	100
% F	11	7	35	24	2	17	4	100

### Question 4

How would you rate your own ability in the elements of each language  
Reading, Writing, and Talking?

Very Good                  Good                  OK                  Not Good

#### Gaelic Reading

Response	V Good	Good	O.K	Not Good	Total
L	11	13	9	0	33
H	1	1	4	0	6
U	5	24	10	4	43
B	2	1	3	0	6
Total	19	39	26	4	88
Percent	22	44	30	5	

#### English Reading

Response	V Good	Good	O.K	Not Good	Total
L	21	11	1	0	33
H	1	5	0	0	6
U	11	29	2	1	43
B	4	1	1	0	6
Total	37	46	4	1	88
Percent	42	52	5	1	

#### Gaelic Writing

Response	V Good	Good	O.K	Not Good	Total
L	6	14	11	2	33
H	0	1	4	1	6
U	3	17	21	2	43
B	1	2	3	0	6
Total	10	34	39	5	88
Percent	11	39	44	6	

**English Writing**

Response	V Good	Good	O.K	Not Good	Total
L	16	14	3	0	33
H	0	4	2	0	6
U	4	33	6	0	43
B	3	0	3	0	6
Total	23	51	14	0	88
Percent	26	58	16	0	

**Gaelic Talking**

Response	V Good	Good	O.K	Not Good	Total
L	10	13	7	3	33
H	2	1	3	0	6
U	8	20	14	1	43
B	2	2	1	1	6
Total	22	36	25	5	88
Percent	25	40.91	28.41	5.68	

**English Talking**

Response	V Good	Good	O.K	Not Good	Total
L	19	11	3	0	33
H	4	2	0	0	6
U	15	23	4	1	43
B	5	1	0	0	6
Total	43	37	7	1	88
Percent	49	42	8	1	

## Responses by Gender for Gaelic

### Gaelic Reading

Response	Very Good	Good	O.K	Not Good	Total
M	9	13	10	2	34
F	10	26	16	2	54
Total	19	39	26	4	88
% Male	26	38	29	6	100
% Female	19	48	30	4	100

### Gaelic Writing

Response	Very Good	Good	O.K	Not Good	Total
M	5	11	17	1	34
F	6	23	22	3	54
Total	11	34	39	4	88
% Male	15	32	50	3	100
% Female	11	43	41	6	100

### Gaelic Talking

Response	Very Good	Good	O.K	Not Good	Total
M	8	15	11	0	34
F	14	21	14	5	54
Total	22	36	25	5	88
% Male	24	44	32	0	100
% Female	26	39	26	9	100

## Responses by Gender for English

### English Reading

Response	Very Good	Good	O.K	Not Good	Total
M	12	20	1	1	34
F	25	26	3	0	54
Total	37	46	4	1	88
% Male	35	59	3	3	100
% Female	46	48	6	0	100

### English Writing

Response	Very Good	Good	O.K	Not Good	Total
M	9	17	8	0	34
F	14	33	7	0	54
Total	23	50	15	0	88
% Male	26	50	24	0	100
% Female	26	61	13	0	100

### English Talking

Response	Very Good	Good	O.K	Not Good	Total
M	14	18	2	0	34
F	30	18	5	1	54
Total	44	36	7	1	88
% Male	41	53	6	0	100
% Female	56	33	9	2	100

### Question 5

By the end of your primary school education were you more competent in

- a) Gaelic
- b) English
- c) About the same in both

NR = No response    IR = Invalid response

Response	Gaelic	English	Same	NR	IR	Total
L	6	6	20	1	0	33
H	0	2	4	0	0	6
U	3	16	23	0	1	43
B	2	2	1	1	0	6
Total	11	26	48	2	1	88
Percent	13	30	55	2	1	

## Question 6

What language did you usually speak in the playground in primary school?

a Mostly English

b Mostly Gaelic

c Both Equally

Response	English	Gaelic	Equal	NR	Total
L	26	2	4	1	33
H	6	0	0	0	6
U	38	3	2	0	43
B	6	0	0	0	6
Total	76	5	6	1	88
Percent	86	6	7	1	

## Responses by Gender

Response	English	Gaelic	Equal	NR	Total
M	28	1	4	1	34
F	48	4	2	0	54
Total	76	5	6	1	88
% Male	82	3	12	3	100
% Female	89	7	4	0	100



### Question 7

At home did you speak...

a Mostly English

b Mostly Gaelic

c Both equally

Response	English	Gaelic	Equal	Total
L	20	8	5	33
H	4	0	2	6
U	31	5	7	43
B	4	0	2	6
Total	59	13	16	88
Percent	67	15	18	

### Responses by Gender

Response	English	Gaelic	Equal	Total
M	26	2	6	34
F	33	11	10	54
Total	59	13	16	88
% Male	76	6	18	100
% Female	61	20	19	100

### Question 8

Did your parents prefer you to speak Gaelic at home?

Yes

No

NR = No response.

Response	Yes	No	NR	Total	Yes %	No %	NR %
L	29	4	0	33	33%	5%	0%
H	5	1	0	6	6%	1%	0%
U	29	13	1	43	33%	15%	1%
B	6	0	0	6	7%	0%	0%
Total	69	18	1	88			
Percent	78	20	1				

### Responses by Gender

Response	Yes	No	NR	Total	Yes %	No %	NR %
M	25	8	1	34	28%	9%	1%
F	44	10	0	54	50%	11%	0%
Total	69	18	1	88	78%	20%	1%
% Male	74	24	3	100			
% Female	81	19	0	100			

**Question 9a**

**Has the extent to which you have used Gaelic changed as you have grown older?**

**Yes or No?**

Response	Yes	No	Total
L	23	10	33
H	6	0	6
U	33	10	43
B	6	0	6
Total	68	20	88
Percent	77	23	

**Responses by Gender**

Response	Yes	No	Total
M	26	8	34
F	42	12	54
Total	68	20	88
% Male	76	24	100
% Female	78	22	100

## Question 9b

### Analysis of 'Yes' responses

**a I speak more Gaelic than I used to.**

**b I speak more English than I used to**

**c I read more Gaelic than I used to**

**d I read more English than Gaelic for pleasure**

**e I write more Gaelic than I did before**

**f I write more English than Gaelic for pleasure**

Response	Speak More Gaelic	Speak More English	Read more Gaelic	Read more English	Write more Gaelic	Write more English than Gaelic for Pleasure	No Response	Total
L	3	21	3	18	9	9	0	63
H	3	3	0	2	4	0	0	12
U	17	13	14	14	16	8	2	84
B	2	4	1	5	3	4	0	19
Total	25	41	18	39	32	21	2	178
%	37	60	26	57	47	31	3	

## Question 10

Which of the following best describes the reasons for these changes?

- a English is the main language spoken around me
- b I have more opportunities to speak Gaelic
- c I find that books are more difficult in Gaelic
- d I am more likely to read for pleasure in English
- e My Gaelic fluency has improved as there is more written work in Gaelic
- f At home there is more emphasis on improving English
- g Most of the school subjects are taught in English
- h Gaelic is not used much in the playground or outside the classroom

Response	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	NR	Total Ticks	Total
L	19	5	11	14	4	2	20	17	6	98	34
H	6	0	1	12	4	0	4	5	0	32	54
U	22	8	17	15	16	7	22	24	8	139	88
B	4	2	5	6	4	1	6	5	0	33	
Total	51	15	34	47	28	10	52	51	14	302	
Resp %	17	5	11	16	9	3	17	17	5		
Pupil %	58%	17%	39%	53%	32%	11%	59%	58%	16%		

## Responses by Gender

Response	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	NR	Total Ticks	Total
M	21	6	14	15	10	4	20	20	7	117	34
F	30	9	20	21	18	6	32	31	7	174	54
Total	51	15	34	36	28	10	52	51	14	291	88
% Male	18	5	12	13	9	3	17	17	6		
% Female	17	5	11	12	10	3	18	18	4		
% Male	62	18	41	44	29	12	59	59	21		
% Female	56	17	37	39	33	11	59	57	13		

## **Question 11**

### **Review of Responses**

**Write down in your own words how coming to secondary has made a difference to the amount of Gaelic that you speak, read and write.**

### **Lewis Responses**

#### **Speaking**

Less spoken Gaelic used in classroom situation in Secondary (2)

Gaelic used less outside school (3)

Most of the teachers don't speak Gaelic (1)

I don't speak as much Gaelic in Secondary (5)

It has improved in some areas but decreased in others (2)

More opportunities to speak in Gaelic, Radio, TV (1)

I speak more (2)

My vocabulary has improved (1)

Not much difference (2)

#### **Reading**

Reading more difficult (2)

There are no magazines in Gaelic for people my age (1)

I don't read as much (3)

About the same (2)

Less (3)

I only read when I have to (3)

I read more (2)

It is much easier to read now (1)

Improved a lot (1)

**Writing**

Same volume of English and Gaelic written homework given (1)

I write more (5)

I write less (6)

Writing has improved (2)

Improved a lot (1)

About the same (1)

Got worse (1)

**No response**

Speaking (12)

Reading (14)

Writing (14)

## **Barra Responses**

### **Speaking**

Can be very hard (1)

I speak less (2)

I speak a lot at home and in Grandparents (1)

My family encourages me to speak more (1)

Vocabulary has changed a lot since primary (1)

### **Reading**

About the same (1)

I rarely read Gaelic (1)

I was taught to read well in primary (1)

I read less (1)

Improved a little (1)

I read more (1)

### **Writing**

I write more (2)

I don't write at all (1)

My writing has improved (3)

My spelling mistakes have gone up in secondary (1)

### **No Response**

Speaking (1)

Reading (1)

Writing (1)



**Uist Responses****Speaking**

A lot (1)

I now speak in my Gaelic class (1)

I have improved (9)

I speak more Gaelic with friends and at home (3)

Speaking is one of my downfalls (1)

I speak less (4)

About the same (2)

There are more speaking tasks in secondary (5)

**Reading**

Quite a lot (2)

I read more Gaelic books at home (9)

I am more confident (1)

My reading has improved (9)

About the same (1)

I read less (1)

The books are more interesting in Secondary (2)

**Writing**

A lot (1)

I write more Gaelic essays (6)

I have improved (10)

I enjoy writing (2)

I write less (2)

I only write when I have to (1)

I write stories and enter competitions (1)

I am good in English but not as good in Gaelic (1)

**No Response**

Speaking (12)

Reading (14)

Writing (14)

**Harris Responses****Speaking**

Quite different (2)

Not much difference (1)

I only use Gaelic in class (1)

I am more confident as vocabulary has improved (1)

**Reading**

Quite different (1)

Big difference (1)

I only read Gaelic if I have to (1)

**Writing**

Quite different (1)

Big difference (1)

I write a lot in class but not to my friends (1)

**No response**

Speaking (1)

Reading (3)

Writing (2)

## Question 12

How do you rate Gaelic in terms of difficulty compared to other subjects you are studying? Arrange your subjects on the line below in order of difficulty starting with the easiest.

1 Easy \_\_\_\_\_ 8 Hard

NR = No response

IR = Invalid response

Response	1 Easy	2	3	4	5	6	7	8 Hard	NR	IR	Total
L	6	8	3	4	1	2	2	0	2	5	33
H	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	6
U	0	3	5	9	10	2	6	3	5	0	43
B	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	6
Total	7	11	11	15	11	5	8	4	8	8	88
Total (%)	8%	13%	13%	17%	13%	6%	9%	5%	9%	9%	

Percentage of responses 1-4 (Easy) 50%

Percentage of responses 5-8 (Hard) 31%

### Responses by Gender

Response	1 Easy	2	3	4	5	6	7	8 Hard	NR	IR	Total
M	0	5	6	9	2	2	2	2	3	3	34
F	7	6	5	6	9	3	6	2	5	5	54
Total	7	11	11	15	11	5	8	4	8	8	88
% Male	0	15	18	26	6	6	6	6	9	9	100
% Female	13	11	9	11	17	6	11	4	9	9	100

### Q12 Responses Grouped

Response	1--->3 Easier	4 & 5 so-so	6--->8 Harder
% Male	32	32	18
% Female	33	28	20

### Q12 Responses Split

Response	1--->4 Easier	5--->8 Harder
% Male	59	24
% Female	44	37

### Question 13

Why did you choose Gaelic as a subject at the end of S2? Tick the box which best describes your reason.

a I liked the subject

b I got high marks in S2 assessment

c There are career prospects in Gaelic related jobs

d I was influenced by my parents

e I preferred it to other language options on the timetable

f Other reasons

NA = Not Applicable

Response	Liked	Marks	Career	Parents	Preferred	Other	NA	Total Ticks	Pupil Total
L	10	14	11	5	12	4	0	56	34
H	3	2	1	1	1	0	0	8	54
U	12	10	6	10	22	5	0	65	88
B	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	6	
Total	25	26	18	16	35	9	6	135	
%	19	19	13	12	26	7	4		
				% e+b =	45				

### Responses by Gender

Response	Liked	Marks	Career	Parents	Preferred	Other	NA	Total Ticks	Pupil Total
M	7	11	7	6	14	6	2	53	34
F	18	15	11	10	21	3	4	82	54
Total	25	26	18	16	35	9	6	135	88
% Male	13	21	13	11	26	11	4	100	
% Female	22	18	13	12	26	4	5	100	
% Male	21	32	21	18	41	18	6		
% Female	33	28	20	19	39	6	7		

**Question 14****Are you happy that you chose Gaelic at the end of S2?****Yes****No****NR= No response****IR= Invalid Response**

Response	Yes	No	NR	IR	Total
L	28	4	0	1	33
H	6	0	0	0	6
U	35	8	0	0	43
B	4	0	2	0	6
Total	73	12	2	1	88
Percent	83	14	2	1	

**Response by Gender**

Response	Yes	No	NR	IR	Total
M	30	4	0	0	34
F	43	8	2	1	54
Total	73	12	2	1	88
%Male	88	12	0	0	100
%Female	80	15	4	2	100

### Question 15

Are you happy that you chose Gaelic? Why or Why Not?

Yes

No

Response	Positive	Negative	Total
L	35	5	40
H	6	1	7
U	39	11	50
B	3	3	6
Total	83	20	103

### Q 15 Lewis Response

#### Positive Responses

Being more comfortable (1)

Liking (2)

Finding it easy (8)

Opportunities (3)

I have extended my vocabulary (2)

Job opportunities (7)

I have a good class (1)

It is dying out. I wish more people would learn it. (1)

I am good at it (3)

I am not good at French. Gaelic was easier (4)

#### Negative Responses

It is quite hard. I mix up vocabulary with French (1)

I don't really like it but I know it better (1)

I don't like speaking it. (1)

I can't read or write it well (1)

I would have preferred S grade PE (1)

**Q 15 Barra Responses****Positive Responses**

It is our native language (1)

I like it (1)

It is easier for learners than other languages (1)

**Negative Responses**

It is better than having to do French (1)

**No response**

(2)



## Q 15 Uist Responses

### Positive responses

Like it (1)  
 Doing well (4)  
 Enjoy it (7)  
 Because I feel comfortable (1)  
 Don't want to see it die out (2)  
 I think it is a very traditional thing (1)  
 Career opportunity (6)  
 Because my friends took it (1)  
 Because I have been talking in Gaelic all my life (1)  
 Because I have improved over the years (2)  
 Because I can talk to my grandparents family (2)  
 I am better at Gaelic (1)  
 Gaelic is better easier than French, other languages (3)  
 I can understand people better when they speak to me (1)  
 It is useful in a Gaelic speaking community (1)  
 It has enabled me to write in the language (1)  
 Improved my confidence in speaking (1)  
 It is my native first language (2)

### Negative Responses

Glad I'm not doing French (1)  
 Don't want to do German (1)  
 Because I hate or dislike French (3)  
 I don't like Gaelic (1)  
 Other subjects are harder (2)  
 I don't enjoy it but it will help me in the future (1)  
 I am not good at it and would do better in another subject (1)

**No response** (1)

**Q 15 Harris Responses****Positive Responses**

Lots of people speak it (1)

Because you can talk to older people (1)

Because Gaelic is improving everywhere (1)

It would be better than the other subjects (1)

Because I understand it (1)

It is not difficult (1)

**Negative Responses**

Because I do not like French (1)

## Question 16

Which aspects of studying Gaelic do you enjoy the most and why?

Reading      Writing      Talking      Listening

### Review of responses

Response	Number
Reading	29
Writing	27
Talking	38
Listening	5

Response	Positive	Negative	Total
L	46	5	51
H	10	0	10
U	37	7	44
B	6	2	8
Total	99	14	113

### Lewis Responses

#### Positive

Writing (10)

Talking (17)

Listening (3)

Reading (16)

#### Negative

Don't know (1)

Don't like reading (1)

#### No response

(3)

**Uist Responses****Positive responses**

Writing (11)

Listening (2)

Talking (14)

Reading (10)

**Negative responses**

I don't like writing (1)

I don't like any aspect of Gaelic (1)

I hate writing (1)

Reading is hard (1)

**No response**

(3)

**Harris Responses****Positive**

Writing (4)

Talking (4)

Reading (2)

**Negative**

(Nil)

**No Response**

(Nil)

**Barra Responses****Positive**

Writing (2)

Talking (3)

Reading (1)

**Negative**

(Nil)

**No Response**

(2)

### Question 17

Thinking about Question 16, please write a few sentences mentioning anything you dislike about studying Gaelic.

**Table of Expressed Dislikes**

Response	Number	% Pupils
No Response	16	20
No Dislikes	7	9
Too hard	3	4
Reading	6	8
Talking	12	15
Homework	9	11
Learning	1	1
Listening	3	4
Grammar	2	3
Spelling	2	3
Not Learning Naturally	2	3
Boring	4	5
High Teacher Expectations	1	1
Tests	2	3
Resented by Other Class	1	1
Writing	9	11

## Question 18

Having been through the Gaelic medium system, what do you think Gaelic has done for you? Respond to the following.

- a Gaelic makes me feel more Scottish
- b Gaelic gives me more job opportunities
- c Gaelic makes me proud to be a Gael
- d Gaelic has made me better at languages
- e Gaelic has made me more aware of the history of the Highlands and Islands
- f Gaelic has given me a better social life

Response	Scottish	Jobs	Pride	Languages	History	Socially	NR	Total Ticks	Pupil Total
L	10	22	9	14	6	2	1	64	34
H	2	4	3	0	0	0	0	9	54
U	15	11	11	14	15	4	3	73	88
B	2	2	4	5	5	3	0	21	
Total	29	39	27	33	26	9	4	167	
Resp %	17%	23%	16%	20%	16%	5%	2%		
Pupil %	33%	44%	31%	38%	30%	10%	5%		

## Responses by Gender

Response	Scots	Jobs	Pride	Language	History	Socially	NR	Total Ticks	Pupil Total	Answer Ratio
M	9	9	6	10	9	1	2	46	34	1.35
F	20	30	21	23	17	8	2	121	54	2.24
Total	29	39	27	33	26	9	4	167	88	
% Male	20	20	13	22	20	2	4	100		
% Female	17	25	17	19	14	7	2	100		
% Male	26	26	18	29	26	3	6			
% Female	37	56	39	43	31	15	4			

## Question 19

How important have the following been to you in your Gaelic education?

**Very / Fairly**

- a Gaining fluency in the written language**
- b Learning about the history of the Gaelic speaking people**
- c Learning about Gaelic folklore, poetry, songs, customs**
- d Developing an extensive vocabulary**
- e Becoming aware of your identity as a Gael**
- f Learning a system of grammar**
- g Being able to express thoughts and ideas with the same level of fluency as in English (being bilingual)**
- h Enjoying Gaelic Radio, TV, Music, Performing Arts**
- i Being more effective as a member of a Gaelic community**

**‘Very’**

Response	Writing	History	Folklore	Vocab	Identity	Grammar	Bilingual	Arts	Community	Total
L	19	3	8	22	7	19	14	13	13	118
H	0	3	3	0	4	0	1	3	1	15
U	18	9	12	26	11	23	20	18	20	157
B	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	2	4	26
Very Total	40	17	26	51	25	45	38	36	38	316
Percent	13	5	8	16	8	14	12	11	12	

**‘Fairly’**

Response	Writing	History	Folklore	Vocab	Identity	Grammar	Bilingual	Arts	Community	Total
L	11	23	18	6	21	10	10	17	15	131
H	6	3	2	5	2	5	5	2	4	34
U	20	31	28	13	30	16	21	24	19	202
B	1	3	2	1	2	2	1	3	1	16
Fairly Total	38	60	50	25	55	33	37	46	39	383
Percent	10	16	13	7	14	9	10	12	10	



## Responses by Gender

### ‘Very’

Resp	Writing	History	Folklore	Vocabulary	Identity	Grammar	Bilingual	Arts	Community	Total Ticks	Pupil Total	Answer Ratio
M	18	9	7	20	11	19	15	11	14	124	34	3.65
F	22	8	19	31	14	26	23	25	24	192	54	3.56
Total	40	17	26	51	25	45	38	36	38	316	88	
%M Ticks	15	7	6	16	9	15	12	9	11	100		
% F Ticks	11	4	10	16	7	14	12	13	13	100		
%M Pupils	53	26	21	59	32	56	44	32	41			
%F Pupils	41	15	35	57	26	48	43	46	44			

### ‘Fairly’

Resp	Writing	History	Folklore	Vocab	Identity	Grammar	Bilingual	Arts	Community	Total Ticks	Pupil Total	Answer Ratio
M	16	23	24	11	23	13	19	21	18	168	34	4.94
F	22	37	26	14	32	20	18	25	21	215	54	3.98
Total	38	60	50	25	55	33	37	46	39	383	88	
%M Ticks	10	14	14	7	14	8	11	13	11	100		
% F Ticks	10	17	12	7	15	9	8	12	10	100		
%M Pupils	47	68	71	32	68	38	56	62	53			
%F Pupils	41	69	48	26	59	37	33	46	39			

Response	M Very	F Very	M Fair	F Fair	Very	Fairly
Writing	18	22	16	22	45	43
History	9	8	23	37	19	68
Folklore	7	19	24	26	30	57
Vocabulary	20	31	11	14	58	28
Identity	11	14	23	32	28	63
Grammar	19	26	13	20	51	38
Bilingual	15	23	19	18	43	42
Arts	11	25	21	25	41	52
Community	14	24	18	21	43	44
Total Ticks	124	192	168	215	316	383
Pupil Total	34	54	34	54	88	88
Answer Ratio	3.65	3.56	4.94	3.98		

## Question 20

In primary school Gaelic Medium pupils formed a distinct group. What experiences have you had in secondary school of Gaelic groupings?

- a Being in a fluent Gaelic class
- b Studying another subject or subjects through the medium of Gaelic
- c Being in a Gaelic school club
- d Being a member of a Gaelic school choir
- e Other

Response	Fluent	Gael Med	Club	Choir	Other	NR	Total
L	30	13	0	9	4	0	56
H	6	1	0	3	1	0	11
U	35	7	6	9	3	2	62
B	6	4	0	1	0	0	11
Total	77	25	6	22	8	2	140
%Resp	55	18	4	16	6	1	
Pupil %	88	28	7	25	9	2	

### Responses by Gender

Response	Fluent	Gael Med	Club	Choir	Other	NR	Total Ticks	Total Pupils	Answer Ratio
M	31	10	0	4	5	1	51	34	1.50
F	46	15	6	18	3	1	89	54	1.65
Total	77	25	6	22	8	2	140	88	
% M Ticks	61	20	0	8	10	2	100		
% F Ticks	52	17	7	20	3	1	100		
% M Pupils	91	29	0	12	15	3			
% F Pupils	85	28	11	33	6	2			

## Question 21

**Do you hear Gaelic being spoken in your school outwith the classroom?**

**Rarely          Regularly          Quite Often          Very Often**

**P:    By other pupils**

**NGT: By Teaching staff, not Gaelic teachers**

**GT:    By Gaelic teachers**

**NTS: By members of staff who are not teachers**

**V:    By official visitors**

**Pa    By visiting parents**

**ANN: In announcements**

**ASS:    In assemblies**

### **‘Rarely’**

Response	P	NGT	GT	NTS	V	PA	ANN	ASS	Total
L	32	12	0	10	28	15	32	32	161
H	6	0	0	3	3	1	6	6	25
U	39	13	0	3	23	15	38	36	167
B	6	2	0	1	4	5	5	5	28
Total	83	27	0	17	58	36	81	79	381
Percent	94	31	0	19	66	41	92	90	

### **‘Regularly’**

Response	P	NGT	GT	NTS	V	PA	ANN	ASS	Total
L	0	9	3	11	3	13	1	1	41
H	0	1	0	3	2	3	0	0	9
U	4	12	4	6	14	13	4	5	62
B	0	4	1	2	1	11	1	1	21
Total	4	26	8	22	20	40	6	7	133
Percent	5	30	9	25	23	45	7	8	

**‘Quite Often’**

Response	P	NGT	GT	NTS	V	PA	ANN	ASS	Total
L	1	9	7	10	2	4	0	0	33
H	0	3	2	1	2	1	0	0	9
U	0	14	15	24	6	12	0	2	73
B	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	3
Total	1	26	25	37	10	17	0	2	118
Percent	1	30	28	42	11	19	0	2	

**‘Very Often’**

Response	P	NGT	GT	NTS	V	PA	ANN	ASS	Total
L	0	3	23	1	1	0	0	0	28
H	0	0	2	0	0	1	2	0	5
U	0	4	16	9	1	3	0	0	33
B	0	0	4	1	0	0	0	0	5
Total	0	7	45	11	2	4	2	0	71
Percent	0	8	51	13	2	5	2	0	

**Combined Responses of ‘Regularly’ & ‘Quite Often’**

Response	P	NGT	GT	NTS	V	PA	ANN	ASS	Total
L	1	18	10	21	5	17	1	1	74
H	0	4	2	4	4	4	0	0	18
U	4	26	19	30	20	25	4	7	92
B	0	4	2	4	1	11	1	1	24
Total	5	52	33	59	30	57	6	9	208
Percent	6%	59%	38%	67%	34%	65%	7%	10%	

**Responses by Gender****‘Rarely’**

	Response	P	NGT	GT	NTS	V	PA	ANN	ASS	Total Ticks	Pupil Total
	M	32	10	0	9	27	15	33	32	158	34
	F	51	17	0	8	31	21	48	47	223	54
	Total	83	27	0	17	58	36	81	79	381	88
Ticks	% Male	20	6	0	6	17	9	21	20	100	
Ticks	% Female	23	8	0	4	14	9	22	21	100	
Pupils	% Male	94	29	0	26	79	44	97	94		
Pupils	% Female	94	31	0	15	57	39	89	87		

**‘Regularly’**

	Response	P	NGT	GT	NTS	V	PA	ANN	ASS	Total Ticks	Pupil Total
	M	3	9	1	6	7	14	0	0	40	34
	F	1	17	7	16	13	16	6	7	83	54
	Total	4	26	8	22	20	30	6	7	123	88
Ticks	% Male	8	23	3	15	18	35	0	0	100	
Ticks	% Female	1	20	8	19	16	19	7	8	100	
Pupils	% Male	9	26	3	18	21	41	0	0		
Pupils	% Female	2	31	13	30	24	30	11	13		

**‘Quite Often’**

	Response	P	NGT	GT	NTS	V	PA	ANN	ASS	Total Ticks	Pupil Total
	M	0	10	12	15	3	3	0	0	43	34
	F	1	16	13	22	7	14	0	2	75	54
	Total	1	26	25	37	10	17	0	2	118	88
Ticks	% Male	0	23	28	35	7	7	0	0	100	
Ticks	% Female	1	21	17	29	9	19	0	3	100	
Pupils	% Male	0	29	35	44	9	9	0	0		
Pupils	% Female	2	30	24	41	13	26	0	4		

**‘Very Often’**

	Response	P	NGT	GT	NTS	V	PA	ANN	ASS	Total Ticks	Pupil Total
	M	0	3	20	3	1	0	2	0	29	34
	F	0	4	25	8	1	4	0	0	42	54
	Total	0	7	45	11	2	4	2	0	71	88
Ticks	% Male	0	10	69	10	3	0	7	0	100	
Ticks	% Female	0	10	60	19	2	10	0	0	100	
Pupils	% Male	0	9	59	9	3	0	6	0		
Pupils	% Female	0	7	46	15	2	7	0	0		

**Composite Response %**

Response	P	NGT	GT	NTS	V	PA	ANN	ASS
Rarely %	94%	31%	0%	19%	66%	41%	92%	90%
Regular %	5%	30%	9%	25%	23%	45%	7%	8%
Q Oft %	1%	30%	28%	42%	11%	19%	0%	2%
V Oft %	0%	8%	51%	13%	2%	5%	2%	0%

Response	P	NGT	GT	NTS	V	PA	ANN	ASS
Rarely %	94%	31%	0%	19%	66%	41%	92%	90%
Some %	6%	59%	38%	67%	34%	65%	7%	10%
V Oft %	0%	8%	51%	13%	2%	5%	2%	0%

## Question 22

Outwith school which of the following activities do you take part in?

**Regularly**

**Rarely**

**Sometimes**

**Never**

**a Conversation with friends**

**b Conversation with parents/guardians**

**c Conversation with brothers, sisters**

**d Reading books, magazines, newspapers**

**e Listening to Gaelic Radio**

**f Watching TV Programmes**

**g Using Gaelic in working with adults e.g. croft work, babysitting**

**h Prayer or Participating in Gaelic Church services**

### ‘Regularly’

Response	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	Total	Tot Pupils
L	1	18	4	0	4	7	3	5	42	88
H	0	2	0	0	1	0	1	0	4	
U	2	13	1	3	10	10	10	13	62	
B	0	2	0	1	3	3	3	4	16	
Total	3	35	5	4	18	20	17	22	124	
Resp %	2%	28%	4%	3%	15%	16%	14%	18%		
Pupil %	3	40	6	5	20	23	19	25		

### ‘Sometimes’

Response	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	Total
L	3	9	11	5	8	12	16	8	72
H	2	3	1	0	2	3	3	1	15
U	5	16	11	15	12	16	14	13	102
B	0	3	1	2	1	2	0	0	9
Total	10	31	24	22	23	33	33	22	198
Resp %	5%	16%	12%	11%	12%	17%	17%	11%	
Pupil %	11	35	27	25	26	38	38	25	

**‘Rarely’**

Response	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	Total
L	11	3	6	10	14	8	9	10	71
H	2	0	1	4	3	2	1	3	16
U	7	10	9	19	13	12	8	8	86
B	1	2	3	3	0	0	2	2	13
Total	21	15	19	36	30	22	20	23	186
Resp %	11%	8%	10%	19%	16%	12%	11%	12%	
Pupil %	24	17	22	41	34	25	23	26	

**‘Never’**

Response	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	Total
L	19	4	13	10	6	5	4	9	70
H	2	1	4	2	0	1	1	2	13
U	29	7	14	7	8	3	12	12	92
B	4	0	2	0	2	1	1	0	10
Total	54	12	33	19	16	10	18	23	185
Resp %	29%	6%	18%	10%	9%	5%	10%	12%	
Pupil %	61	14	38	22	18	11	20	26	

**Composite response**

Response	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h
Regular %	3	40	6	5	20	23	19	25
S Times %	11	35	27	25	26	38	38	25
Rarely %	24	17	22	41	34	25	23	26
Never %	61	14	38	22	18	11	20	26

Response	To Friends	To Parents
Regular %	3	40
S Times %	11	35
Rarely %	24	17
Never %	61	14



**Responses by Gender****‘Regularly’**

Response	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	Total
M	2	12	5	1	7	5	6	9	47
F	1	23	0	3	13	15	11	13	79
Total	3	35	5	4	20	20	17	22	126

**‘Sometimes’**

Response	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	Total
M	4	11	6	5	9	11	14	6	66
F	6	20	18	17	14	22	19	16	132
Total	10	31	24	22	23	33	33	22	198

**‘Rarely’**

Response	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	Total
M	8	7	6	20	12	11	5	8	77
F	13	8	13	16	18	11	15	15	109
Total	21	15	19	36	30	22	20	23	186

**‘Never’**

Response	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	Total
M	23	5	18	8	4	6	7	8	79
F	31	7	15	11	12	4	11	15	106
Total	54	12	33	19	16	10	18	23	185

### Question 23

Do you find Gaelic TV/Radio programmes are useful mainly for

a Entertainment

b Study

NR = No Response

I R = Invalid Response

Response	Entertainment	Study	NR	IR	Total
L	25	6	1	1	33
H	6	0	0	0	6
U	26	15	2	0	43
B	4	1	1	0	6
Total	61	22	4	1	88
Percent	69	25	5	1	

### Responses by Gender

Response	Entertainment	Study	NR	IR	Total
M	21	11	1	1	34
F	40	11	3	0	54
Total	61	22	4	1	88
% Male	62	32	3	3	100
% Female	74	20	6	0	100

## Question 24

Here are some comments about Gaelic. Tick the box next to the statement or statements that are closest to your own viewpoint.

- a Gaelic is a language for the Highlands and Islands
- b Gaelic is a language for the whole of Scotland
- c Gaelic is a language that is dying out.
- d Many more natives are speaking Gaelic than before
- e Gaelic is a language that people in Scotland want to learn
- f Gaelic is only useful as a language for the croft
- g Gaelic could be used in all aspects of life: work, business, pleasure.

Response	H & I	All Scot	Dying	Natives	Learners	Croft	Every where	Total Ticks	Pupil Total
L	10	14	20	0	10	0	23	77	34
B	0	6	3	2	3	0	6	20	54
U	15	21	29	11	18	1	25	120	88
B	2	5	4	44	4	0	6	25	
Total	27	46	56	57	35	1	60	242	
Percent	11	19	23	24	14	0	25		

### Responses by Gender

Response	H & I	All Scot	Dying	Natives	Learners	Croft	Every where	Total Ticks	Pupil Total
M	11	22	27	4	11	0	18	93	34
F	16	24	29	13	24	1	42	149	54
Total	27	46	56	17	35	1	60	242	88
% Male	12	24	29	4	12	0	19	100	
% Female	11	16	19	9	16	1	28	100	
% Male	32	65	79	12	32	0	53		
% Female	30	44	54	24	44	2	78		

## Question 25

If Gaelic is to survive which of the following would help?

- a Giving more publicity to Gaelic
- b Having more Gaelic taught in schools
- c More T/V and Radio
- d Giving more support to parents of pupils in Gaelic Medium
- e More Government funding
- f By having official language status for Gaelic
- g Other ways

Response	Publicity	Teaching	TV/Radio	Support	Funding	Status	Other	Total
L	20	22	20	15	18	14	4	113
H	2	5	3	6	3	2	0	21
U	27	22	18	19	26	11	4	127
B	5	5	3	3	3	4	1	24
Total	54	54	44	43	50	31	9	285
Percent	19	19	15	15	18	11	3	

## Responses by Gender

Response	Publicity	Teaching	TV/Radio	Support	Funding	Status	Other	Ticks Total	Total Pupils
M	19	18	18	14	19	12	3	103	34
F	35	36	26	29	31	19	6	182	54
Total	54	54	44	43	50	31	9	285	88
% Male	18	17	17	14	18	12	3	100	
% Female	19	20	14	16	17	10	3	100	
% Male	56	53	53	41	56	35	9		
% Female	65	67	48	54	57	35	11		

## Question 26

Which of the following best describes the way you see yourself?

- a As a Scot
- b As a Gael and then a Scot
- c As a Gael only
- d My Scottish and Gaelic identities are of equal value to me.
- e I do not see identity as being important

Response	Scot	Gael First	Gael Only	Equal	Unimportant	Total
L	13	6	0	10	4	33
H	5	1	0	0	0	6
U	18	4	0	12	9	43
B	2	1	0	3	0	6
Total	38	12	0	25	13	88
Percent	43	14	0	28	15	

### Response by Gender

Response	Scot	Gael First	Gael Only	Equal	Unimportant	Total
M	17	3	0	9	5	34
F	21	9	0	16	8	54
Total	38	12	0	25	13	88
% Male	50	9	0	26	15	
% Female	39	17	0	30	15	

## Question 27

**Finally do you have any further comments to make on your experience of Gaelic-medium education?**

Response	Positive	Negative	No Response	Total
L	15	3	17	35
H	0	0	6	6
U	5	5	32	42
B	2	5	1	8
Total	22	13	56	91

### Lewis Responses

#### Positive responses

I am happy to be fluent (2)

It is like a tradition (1)

It has helped my education (2)

The quality of teaching is worse in some cases after primary (2)

More support needed for pupils with one parent who speaks Gaelic (1)

More TV and radio programmes (1)

It has given opportunities to be in programmes (1)

It will provide career opportunities (1)

I am glad I did Gaelic medium no regrets (1)

Good fun (1)

Endless opportunities in life, work, friends, leisure (1)

#### Negative responses

OK in primary but a strain in secondary (2)

It took me longer to learn English in Secondary (1)

#### No response

(17)

## **Uist Responses**

### **Positive Responses**

I will appreciate it when I am older. (1)

There should be more schools on the mainland doing Gaelic medium to stop it from dying out. (1)

It plays a big part in Scottish culture and should not be lost. (2)

It helps me to communicate with older members of extended family (1)

### **Negative Responses**

It was a waste of time (2)

The classes should be made more interesting (1)

Less homework (1)

Learning other subjects is harder in Gaelic (1)

### **No response**

(32)

**Harris Responses****Positive responses**

(0)

**Negative responses**

(0)

**No response**

(6)



**Barra responses****Positive Responses**

It is good fun (1)

Good to know (1)

**Negative response**

No learning support work in Gaelic only in English (1)

You were a different species in Gaelic medium until P6 (1)

I wish we had learned more English grammar (1)

I wish we did not have Gaelic maths (1)

In P 7 we were not reading proper English books (1)

**No response**

(1)

## Appendix C: Parents' Questionnaire

Dear Parent,

I am currently doing some research into the impact of Gaelic-medium education on teenagers in the Western Isles. It would be of great help to me in my studies to have some feedback from parents whose children have been through the Gaelic-medium system. If you can be of assistance please respond to the questions below and return to me in the stamped envelope provided. This is purely an academic study in which I am being supervised by the department of Celtic Studies, University of Glasgow.

### Questions for Parents

1. What were your reasons for choosing Gaelic-medium for your child's primary education?
2. What have been the benefits for your child/children?
3. Were there disadvantages?
4. Do you support the idea of your child studying other subjects through the medium of Gaelic in secondary school?
5. What further support do you consider important in assisting parents who have chosen Gaelic-medium education?
6. Do you think TV and radio play an important role for young people in promoting Gaelic education?

## Appendix D: Summary of Parent Responses

### Question 1: What were your reasons for choosing Gaelic Medium for your child's primary education?

- B1** As a Gaelic learner I wanted my child to experience Gaelic immersion and be bi-lingual in both English and Gaelic, which would broaden her learning experiences and widen her long-term career prospects.
- B1** Extra language. Wanted them to have Gaelic.
- B1** I wished my child to be bi-lingual and firmly believed that Gaelic Medium was the only way to ensure this.
- H1** So my children would learn their native language.
- H1** To ensure that my child benefited from speaking Gaelic in the home.
- H1** As my child was fluent in Gaelic before school I thought this was the best way of ensuring she remained fluent.
- H1** To assist us in reinforcing our children's' Gaelic.
- L1** Gaelic was their first language and we were keen that they would continue to speak, read and write it.
- L1** Because I wanted my children to help preserve the Gaelic language. It's their heritage.
- L1** Both my sons now aged 13 and 16 years were fluent Gaelic speakers pre-school. Without Gaelic Medium this would no longer be the case. A dual language learning broadens their outlook and stretches their capacity for learning.
- L1** They were fluent Gaelic speakers, this would have changed very quickly had they gone into the English medium system.
- L1** More choice - purely educational, for their future.
- L1** Better opportunities for child's future.

- L1** To ensure full bilingualism: fluency and literacy. To allow participation in the full range of cultural opportunities and heritage.
- L1** Spoken at home.
- L1** I wanted them to be able to read, write and think in Gaelic.
- L1** I wanted them to be able to read and write fluently in Gaelic. In my own village school the Primary teachers were not fluent speakers and my children were.
- L1** A desire by both parents who were Gaelic speakers to have our 3 children fluent in Gaelic.
- L1** Ensure fluency in the Gaelic language.  
High standard of education.
- U1** To give my children the opportunity to be as fluent and literate in Gaelic as in English.
- U1** It was the language spoken in the home.
- U1** Please note that the opportunity did not arise for me to put my children through Gaelic Medium education - this was due to lack of interest from parents.
- U1** He was a Gaelic speaker with very little English going to school. I could see no harm in him being taught in Gaelic for a few years in Primary School, but he left Primary School not speaking Gaelic because it was not the language of the playground!
- U1** To retain the Gaelic language plus influence of other parents.
- U1** Being able to speak two languages and learning about the culture they live in.
- U1** My children did not benefit from Gaelic Medium due to lack of interest in my area.
- U1** To support the language - more use of it widely ensures its continuation and survival.

**Question 2: What have been the benefits for your child/children?**

- B2** My daughter is now fluent in Gaelic, can sing competently as a fluent speaker in the Royal National Mod, enjoys participating in school and

local concerts, speaking Gaelic and I believe has an increased confidence in her own abilities.

- B2** Painless Gaelic.  
Access to songs and culture.
- B2** I found they picked up English reading/writing very easily and quickly and are more confident in their abilities as a result.
- H2** My first son is bilingual Gaelic/English.
- H2** He is fluent in reading/writing Gaelic/English while a second son, who did not go into Gaelic Medium as it was not available, is not so fluent in Gaelic writing.
- H2** My child can read, write and speak Gaelic fluently which would probably not have happened in mainstream education.
- H2** Learning and speaking Gaelic in a wider context than just home.
- L2** As well as being able to speak, read and write it gave them opportunities to be involved in mods, TV programmes, radio programmes etc. Classes were small when they began school.
- L2** They are bilingual and preserving another language from extinction.
- L2** Pride in their language and culture.  
Excellent general education.
- L2** Ensuring a high level of fluency and literacy.
- L2** They are all continuing with Gaelic education at High School level.
- L2** She has been involved in TV and radio due to her being in Gaelic Medium
- L2** The above aims have been fully met, also opportunities to experience radio and TV participation.
- L2** Literate in their mother tongue.  
Still in contact with their peoples' culture.
- L2** They are now fluent Gaelic speakers and able to read and write (I'm not sure about think!) in Gaelic.  
Although my husband and I are fluent speakers and the children were fluent when they went to school, without Gaelic Medium education I think their Gaelic would be quite poor by now.

- L2** They are fluent in Gaelic.
- L2** Other languages have been easier to learn e.g. French.  
Sense of belonging/being part of the Gaelic world.  
Increases self confidence.
- U2** To be as fluent and literate in Gaelic as in English.
- U2** Increased their confidence, they found it easier to cope with Native Speakers Gaelic in Secondary School. They were able to attend Eurosgoil (Primary school).
- U2** There are benefits. It helps them with the subject when they go to Secondary school. Conversation at home is mostly in Gaelic so they can understand it and they are capable of speaking Gaelic so maybe one day they will.
- U2** They have a good knowledge of Gaelic.
- U2** Being able to speak, read and write *Gàidhlig*.
- U2** I would have chosen Gaelic Medium for my children if demand was there.
- U2** Good skills in reading and writing Gaelic.

### **Question 3: Were there disadvantages?**

- B3** I worried about her rate of learning i.e. was she on par with peers in mainstream primary, there was also a slight issue with 'sounds' and in the instance of my second daughter problems were recognised with her spelling age which are still apparent.
- B3** Occasional resistance by family and our own children.
- B3** Maths was a problem but I felt that that was the teacher's fault, not being able to teach that subject correctly through the medium of Gaelic.
- H3** Yes, there were problems with the teacher and it was not resolved so children were taken out of the Gaelic Medium and my two younger children missed out learning their languages.
- H3** None. He seemed to gain enormously from it.
- H3** A smaller group possibly 'alienated' from the rest of the school.

- H3** None apart from the incompetent teacher appointed by the Education Department who then refused to deal with the issue.
- L3** Yes. I cannot speak Gaelic so a slight disadvantage was I was unable to be of any real help when they were doing homework, but the school allowed for this.
- L3** Small class numbers leading to P1 - P7 being taught together in some cases. Jealousy factor - mainstream parents being of the impression that any additional teaching support was to the detriment of mainstream.
- L3** Lack of resources has always been a problem.
- L3** Absolutely none.
- L3** None.
- L3** None.
- L3** No. Not one - save a few sneers from the monoglots. Easy to put up with.
- L3** No.
- L3** No.
- L3** Early Primary meant harder work than their mainstream peers.
- U3** Nil.
- U3** Reading materials not always suitable. Not really - perhaps by First Year they felt they had had enough!! I don't think this is commonly felt, just personally felt by my own children.
- U3** Very few in early Primary years, but after that there might be some disadvantages, certainly in secondary education.
- U3** They had more work to do and going into P3 they had to develop English reading and writing fast to catch up with their peers.
- U3** Less confident in English.
- U3** None.

**Question 4: Do you support the idea of your child/children studying other subjects through the medium of Gaelic in secondary school?**

- B4** My children chose not to study other subjects through the medium of Gaelic in secondary school, which I supported.
- B4** Yes.
- B4** Yes.
- H4** Yes.
- H4** Yes, but unfortunately the option is not available.
- H4** Yes.
- H4** Yes.
- L4** No.
- L4** No, because in today's life, English is the language in which all bodies of life can associate with, therefore career wise, I don't believe Gaelic would be advantageous.
- L4** Yes.
- L4** Yes. Our four children were taught through the medium of Gaelic in secondary school for the first two years.
- L4** Yes to a degree. Provision at present is adequate.
- L4** Yes.
- L4** Yes. It is important in terms of learning and language status. Guidance input in Gaelic is also very important.
- L4** I did at one time but less now. There are not many capable teachers - or willing ones. It is more important that they are taught good Gaelic, grammatical Gaelic.
- L4** Yes.
- L4** It can be as easy in Gaelic as in English if done properly.
- L4** Yes providing there was an exam in Gaelic, otherwise no.
- L4** No - would add to the pressure of extra programme.



- U4** No.
- U4** Yes - some subjects but not all e.g. not Science or Modern Studies. Gaelic Maths in Primary may have held them back.
- U4** No. Subjects are more complex and it would be a disadvantage to be studying them in a language that you might not be using in college, university or working later on in life.
- U4** To a certain extent.
- U4** No!
- U4** Yes.
- U4** Yes - but it must be done in an attractive and positive way with motivated teachers and good resources.

**Question 5: What further support do you consider important in assisting parents who have chosen Gaelic-medium education?**

- B5** More information about how children will progress being taught through the medium of Gaelic.  
Learning Support being readily available.
- B5** Moral support/exchange of ideas and problems/keep them informed of research and reassure them that it is the right choice.
- B5** More assistance for parents to enable them to assist their child with homework (I am not a Native speaker).
- H5** Good support from the school especially if parents do not speak the language. The children should not miss out. Adult learning classes for Basic Gaelic for parents.
- H5** To encourage their children in speaking Gaelic outside school, if at all possible, especially among peer group.
- H5** More support and help for non Gaelic speaking parents.
- H5** A supportive Council that will deal with Education issues like teacher competency rather than sticking their heads in the sand, leaving the teacher in situ so as to spoil any chance of a Gaelic resurgence in our community.

- L5** For non-Gaelic speaking parents it must be impossible to give any help to their children with homework etc. I think there should be some support there are the kids are at a great disadvantage.
- L5** The bringing of attention to all parents, Gaelic speaking or not, that Gaelic medium tuition advantages far outweigh the disadvantages.
- L5** Support, for example, Gaelic classes for parents who do not speak the language and who wish to learn.
- L5** More teacher support for non-Gaelic speaking parents.
- L5** Community networks of supportive Gaelic speakers willing to assist Gaelic Medium pupils with non-Gaelic speaking parents in terms of homework.
- L5** It is important that they can assist with children's homework. Anything that encourages their own oral proficiency.
- L5** Non-Gaelic speaking parents need help in coping with things like homework.
- L5** None.
- L5** Assistance for parents in helping with homework, especially non-Gaelic speakers.
- U5** I think making an effort to speak Gaelic at home is the most important back-up for pupils who have chosen Gaelic Medium education. Parents should be encouraged to do this.
- U5** Perhaps more social events and after school study sessions for parents who have chosen Gaelic Medium but aren't fluent in Gaelic themselves.
- U5** To remind parents of extra work when developing English skills.
- U5** I think it is important that at least one of the parents can read and speak *Gàidhlig*, to be able to assist the child/children with their homework.
- U5** Support for learners. Awareness raising for locals.

**Question 6: Do you think TV and Radio play an important role for young people in promoting Gaelic education?**

- B6** Gaelic television and radio has come a long way recently, there are lots of opportunities coming up for children who have had Gaelic Medium education. How they use it to the best potential?
- B6** Potentially, yes.
- B6** Certain programmes, yes.
- H6** Yes. My child has been involved in *Sploid* and also *Crowdie* and *Cream* which was a very good experience for him. He is also learning more about his culture through TV and Radio.
- H6** Gaelic TV has an important part, but more use could be made of it - why not have innovative programmes, rather than translations of English ones? Gaelic radio could play more of a part it is too adult-orientated.
- H6** Yes.
- H6** Yes.
- L6** Yes.
- L6** Absolutely. They act as a stimulus for children to think, speak and associated in Gaelic.
- L6** TV:- Yes. Very few children listen to radio programmes.
- L6** Yes, especially programmes where the children themselves participate in.
- L6** Yes as they get opportunities to participate.
- L6** Yes.
- L6** These are very important in terms of education / information / entertainment and also in that young people can be directly involved in programmes.
- L6** Yes, but most TV programmes are far too late in the evening. We are very much behind Wales in this respect and still suffer from Saxon thuggery.
- L6** Yes.

- L6** Yes, especially whilst at Primary School. Teenagers are a bigger challenge.
- L6** Yes.
- L6** Yes - Gaelic Medium education gave children an opportunity to feature on TV and radio, also mod and other stage events. Promotes self confidence and the language.
- U6** No, not really when children are together there are always children present who can not speak Gaelic and they can all speak English so English is spoken. Gaelic radio and TV is unlikely to be as popular as some of the vast selection is English.
- U6** Yes, very much so.
- U6** Yes, especially TV. Not a lot of teenage children would actually listen to Gaelic programmes, unless they were involved in producing them - but certainly TV.
- U6** The quality of Gaelic speaking on radio is too poor - I do not think it is of any value.
- U6** No, lack of advertising.
- U6** No.
- U6** Yes.
- U6** Yes - it has given island children opportunities they would never otherwise get - how many English speakers do you know who appear on TV?

## Appendix E: Schedule of Interview Questions for Teachers and Other Educationalists

- 1            How effective do you think Gaelic Medium has been in promoting fluency in the language?
- 2            Do you think pupils in secondary should study other subjects through the medium of Gaelic?
- 3            If yes to 2, how would you like this to be implemented? In what subject areas?
- 4\*          Would you say that your school [schools] had [have] a Gaelic ethos and if so how is it evident?\*
- 5            How important is the role of parents in promoting fluency?
- 6            Outwith curricular developments what measures would you like to see in place to promote the Gaelic language? On a regional basis. On a national basis.
- 7\*          Does your school [Do your schools] make pupils aware of Gaelic as a minority language?\*
- 8            What do you [does the education authority] think the aims of a secondary school should be in relation to the preservation of Gaelic as a language?

\*            Questions 4 and 7 were adapted for the five educationalists to refer to the Western Isles GME secondary schools generally. Brackets indicate the revised format of the question as given to educationalists.

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