

Feasibility study
into a
Gaelic Medium Primary School for Oban

Delivered by Emma Grant, consultant and coach for community development

1	Executive Summary	3
2	Background and Methodologies.....	4
2.1	Methodology used	4
3	Understanding Gaelic Medium Education.....	5
3.1	What is Gaelic medium education?.....	5
3.2	What are the benefits of Gaelic Medium Education?	6
4	Understanding the Differences Between a Stand-alone School and Gaelic Medium Units	7
4.1	How does a stand-alone school differ?	7
4.2	What are the benefits?	7
4.3	What are the measured benefits of Gaelic schools in other areas?	9
5	National Context.....	10
6	Local Context	11
6.1	Current provision.....	11
6.2	Catchment area	12
6.3	Why Oban? Cultural and historical context.....	13
7	Is it Feasible?	15
7.1	Is there demand?	15
7.2	Is there evidence to show ongoing demand?.....	18
7.3	Will there be teachers?.....	19
7.4	Is there an appropriate location?	21
7.5	How much would it cost?	23
8	How Could This work?	24
8.1	Deciding a model for delivery	24
8.2	Where could the money come from?.....	25
9	What are the Next Steps?.....	26

Appendices associated with this document:

A: Consultee list; B: Maps showing areas owned by council; C: costing report from council; D: reference documents and websites

Abbreviations used throughout:

GMU= Gaelic medium unit; GME = Gaelic medium education; EME = English medium education

Thanks

To all the people who took part in the consultation (see appendix A), and to the people who filled in the surveys. Special thanks go to the following people for sharing their wisdom:

- Duncan MacNeil Administrator at Furan for knowledge of the Gaelic community and language;
- Dr Peadar Morgan, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, for provision of and guidance with statistics;
- Morag Brown, Business Improvement Manager, Argyll and Bute Council and other council officers involved for costing information;
- Ross McLaughlin, Property Development Manager Argyll and Bute Council for provision of information on potential locations.

1 Executive Summary

This study, commissioned by Comann nam Pàrant an Òbain, with funding from Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Argyll and Bute Council seeks to:

“consider the feasibility of a stand-alone Gaelic medium school in Oban with additional community use space and potential income generation streams.”

This study sets the national and local context for such a school and explores the history and culture of the town. It looks at the advantages of bilingualism and the benefits of a stand-alone school compared to a Unit.

Crucially, it is demonstrated through research, meetings, interviews and the questionnaire work conducted, that there are high levels of support for the idea of a stand-alone school and a strong level of commitment to enrol kids in such a school.

Some headlines:

- Bòrd na Gàidhlig aims to increase the number of Gaelic schools from six to ten by 2021 through collaborative work with several councils and capital funding initiatives from Scottish Government
- Argyll has the third highest number of people in Scotland-measured by local authority-speaking Gaelic (2011 census)
- Oban has had a Gaelic medium unit since 1994
 - Some of the first cohort of pupils are now returning to the area as teachers
- 81% of respondents to general survey said they are in favour of a stand-alone school for themselves or others
- 51% of respondents to general survey said that they would consider sending their child(ren) to a Gaelic stand-alone school
- The number of Gaelic medium teachers has been increasing year on year since 2014/5
- Sabhal Mòr Ostaig started a new degree course for teachers in Sept 2017
- Councillors of Oban Lorn and the Islands Area Committee are “supportive of a Gaelic School as part of a centre encompassing the wider Gaelic culture”
- Scottish Government has revenue funds (Specific Grant) and capital funds (Gaelic Schools fund) for the development of Gaelic medium education. A proposal is required from Argyll and Bute Council

2 Background and Methodologies

In January 2018, this study was commissioned by Comann nam Pàrant an Òbain, with funding from Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Argyll and Bute Council.

The brief was to “consider the feasibility of a stand-alone Gaelic medium school in Oban with additional community use space and potential income generation streams.”

The study considers the views of:

- Practitioners in the field, both policy makers and educators
- The wider Gaelic community
- Parents of young children, with a focus on parents with children age 4 or under
- Organisations delivering and developing relevant services in Oban
- Current research into Gaelic medium education
- Local and National Gaelic Language Plans

The feasibility study will be presented to Argyll and Bute Council, Scottish Government, Bòrd na Gàidhlig and other relevant bodies. The study is part of a wider on-going campaign, led by Comann nam Pàrant an Òbain to develop and grow Gaelic medium provision in the Oban area.

The study has the following objectives:

1. To explain Gaelic medium education and its benefits
2. To explain the benefits of a Gaelic medium school in contrast to Gaelic medium unit
3. To show the measured benefits of Gaelic schools in other areas
4. To demonstrate the level of demand for provision
5. To describe the catchment area
6. To present capital costs and potential funding sources
7. To present on-going running costs and possible funding sources
8. To present potential models for delivery
9. To identify potential stakeholders
10. To identify next steps

2.1 Methodology used

The methodology used was a combination of desk-based research; field research, face-to-face and telephone interviews; and a qualitative and quantitative questionnaire with responses gathered face to face and via social media. The questionnaire was also sent to local Primary Schools to further advertise its presence.

Field research

It was agreed to focus field research on the more rural examples of stand-alone schools. To this end Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar (Fort William) and Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh (Portree) were visited.

Face to face and telephone interviews

Wherever possible face to face interviews were set up with key stakeholders--approved by Comann nam Pàrant an Òbain --and (an ever growing) list of people considered relevant.

Interviewees included teachers and Head teachers, Gaelic Development Officers, Bòrd na Gàidhlig staff, Education Officers, Oban and Lorn Councillors, officers from the Scottish Government Gaelic Unit,

representatives of Fèisean nan Gàidheal, Comann nam Pàrant, Fèis Latharna, Rockfield Centre, Oban University Town steering committee.

It is noted that while data collected through conversation is harder to analyse than questionnaire data, this qualitative set of information is considered vital to portraying a rounded and multi-layered picture. Common themes emerged which are represented within the report while not being assigned to any single person.

Questionnaire

Two questionnaires were produced.

The first was aimed at parents not currently accessing GME. Local schools and nurseries were asked for assistance to publicise and circulate this questionnaire. A small number shared on their Facebook pages and one school physically handed out copies of the survey.

The questionnaire was advertised on a variety of local community social media pages, such that any member of the community could respond, though parents were targeted.

It was important to gather the views of parents of pre-school children and babies, as the idea of a new school would be most relevant to them. To this end the consultant attended a variety of baby and toddler playgroups in the Oban area and conducted the survey at the soft play facilities in town.

A second questionnaire was developed for use by parents currently participating in GME. This had the same questions as the original plus a few more in depth. These were all gathered via social media.

Responses of both surveys were checked for duplicate IP addresses to ensure that GME parents were not being counted twice if they had accessed both surveys.

3 Understanding Gaelic Medium Education

3.1 What is Gaelic medium education?

Gaelic medium education is a form of bilingual education which is offered as an option within the Scottish education system. Whether pre-school, primary or secondary, it is a method where Gaelic is used in the classroom to teach the standard curriculum, giving children and young people the opportunity to become fluent in Gaelic in addition to English. Given the preponderance of English, there is a focus on building capabilities in Gaelic in nursery and the early years of primary through ‘immersion’ methods. Children are offered the same learning opportunities across the curriculum as their peers in an English medium setting. By the end of primary school children are bilingual, with speaking, reading and writing abilities in both languages.

This model of bilingual education is used successfully in Wales and Northern Ireland, and internationally, typically for minority languages.

Total Immersion phase:

From age 3 to 7/8 (Sgoil-Àraich to P3) children are taught primarily through the medium of Gaelic. Many children attending Gaelic-medium schooling come from English-speaking homes. Through consultation and field research conducted it is clear that practitioners are cognisant of the challenges that this brings in terms of the need for language acquisition.

Immersion phase:

From age 8 to 11/12 (P4 to P7) immersion education continues. In P4, English is introduced although Gaelic remains the predominant language of the classroom. By the end of P7, children have received the same education across all areas of the curriculum as their counterparts within English medium education.

Research shows that by the time young people are heading to High School, Gaelic medium students have reached the same level of attainment as their English medium counterparts. In addition, Gaelic medium students have attained a second language or—for those who had Gaelic already—have consolidated and developed their skills in Gaelic (O’Hanlon, McLeod, Paterson, 2010). This study also reports:

“In Primary 3, attainment in English is lower among Gaelic-medium pupils than among English-medium pupils, but this gap has disappeared by Primary 5, by which stage Gaelic-medium pupils may in fact be ahead of English-medium pupils in English reading. The higher attainment in English reading is sustained into Primary 7...”

(O’Hanlon et al, 2010, summary, v.)

For the Gaelic-speaking child, GME enables them to become fully literate in their native tongue; the bilingualism being acquired is across speaking, reading and writing.

3.2 What are the benefits of Gaelic Medium Education?

There are six broadly accepted categories for the benefits of GME to the individual and to our communities. The following information above was drawn from these sources:

<https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/my-school/choosing-a-school/> accessed 24th March 2018

<http://www.gaelicmediumeducation.com/faqs.aspx> accessed 24th March 2018

<http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20160811-the-amazing-benefits-of-being-bilingual> accessed 13th April 2018

http://www.assembly.wales/NAfW%20Documents/paper_3_-_prof._colin_baker.pdf%20-%2002092010/paper_3_-_prof._colin_baker-English.pdf

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4INv_lzrgwE

Gaelic Medium Education in Scotland: a guide for parents, Comann nam Pàrant

Cognitive skills

Bilinguals demonstrate improved performance of various mental activities most closely associated with learning and problem solving. Because a bilingual person has learnt to switch from one language to another they have a greater ability to focus on what is meaningful in any given task. Bilinguals can think more flexibly and creatively.

Linguistic skills

Bilingual children develop an early awareness of sounds, words and sentences leading to a richer vocabulary. Once you’ve got two languages, acquiring a third becomes easier.

Social advantages

In Gaelic-speaking areas, there is an increased opportunity to participate fully in all aspects of community life. Having Gaelic lends a depth of understanding to our cultural heritage throughout Scotland and can help to build a bridge between generations, if grandparents, family or community members speak Gàidhlig.

Tolerance, empathy and self-esteem

More broadly, learning two languages and having access to two cultures leads to greater empathy plus bilinguals are reported to have higher levels of self-esteem and are secure in their identity.

Economic advantages

On an individual level, there are many employment opportunities within Education, media and councils where Gaelic is seen as essential or desirable. Being bilingual is a skill that employers are increasingly looking for, both for specific language acquisition but also demonstrating flexibility of mind and approach.

“The research undertaken by Highlands and Islands Enterprise in 2014 showed the potential value of Gaelic as an asset could be up to £149 million. Similarly, the impact of MG ALBA was demonstrated in 2015 to create good quality employment, particularly in areas of low population, and add value to the economy”.

(National Gaelic Language Plan, 2018-2023, page 27, Bòrd na Gàidhlig.)

Health advantages

Some research has indicated that being bilingual may help to keep the brain sharper for longer, preventing the onset of Alzheimer’s and dementia. It has also been observed that bilinguals recover more quickly from a stroke

4 Understanding the Differences Between a Stand-alone School and Gaelic Medium Units

4.1 How does a stand-alone school differ?

- ✓ All teaching staff speak Gaelic.
- ✓ The intention of a Gaelic school is for all ancillary staff to speak Gaelic.
- ✓ After school activities or lunch clubs are delivered in the medium of Gaelic
- ✓ All the children are “mainstream” children
- ✓ Gaelic medium education is on an equal footing to English medium education
- ✓ Leadership and strategic direction of a stand-alone school are focussed on the needs of Gaelic immersion
- ✓ Collegiate time for teachers is wholly dedicated to delivering the Curriculum for Excellence with appropriate attention paid to immersion and specific requirements of language acquisition
- ✓ Increased ability to draw on wider Gaelic community

4.2 What are the benefits?

Common themes emerged when discussing this issue with parents, ex pupils and practitioners

Increased fluency and richness of vocabulary

Speakers of a minority language will tend to operate with a code of respect for others who don’t have that tongue. This means that for Gaelic teachers within a GMU, their default language outside the classroom is English.

Within a Gaelic school, children are within an environment where the language permeates every aspect of the day. Gaelic becomes the language of the corridor, the staff room, the playground the lunch hall and at assemblies. Lunch clubs or after school activities are delivered through the medium of Gaelic. Speaking Gaelic is modelled as being normal to speak within every context. This is beneficial not only for the children but also for staff, for whom Gaelic may also be a second language. A setting where Gaelic is expected to be heard builds confidence in its speakers and has a positive effect on previous generational negative attitude towards speaking the language.

A Gaelic School fulfils the aim of the National Gaelic Language Plan

“Our aim is that Gaelic is used more often, by more people and in a wider range of situations.”

(National Gaelic Language Plan, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2018-20121, page 6)

Increased sense of equality and gravitas

For our children: in a stand-alone school the “Gaelic kids” become the “mainstream” kids. One teacher who has experienced both GMUs and stand-alone schools commented that this “makes a big difference to the ethos of the school and the normalisation of Gaelic.” Another teacher commented that many of the “added value” activities which lead to awards for the children would be able to be delivered in Gaelic medium.

For our parents: personal testimonies reveal (and survey results shown in section 7) that parents can be turned off by the “second class” feeling of GMU provision, as if it’s an annex or afterthought and are more likely to engage with a stand-alone school.

For our staff: some staff report that they can often feel invisible in a GMU within a EME school. In a stand-alone school there are greater opportunities for recognition and progression.

For our communities: a stand-alone school has a much higher visibility than a GMU with increased opportunities to promote the benefits of bilingualism and the importance of Gaelic.

Increased opportunity for wider cultural engagement

A stand-alone school would have a Head Teacher for whom delivery of Gaelic medium education was the sole focus. During the field trip to Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar, strong cultural links to the community were evidenced with Fèis, Mòd, ceilidhs, and Music Festivals all being hosted on a regular basis. This school operates as a Gaelic cultural hub with offices for Bòrd na Gàidhlig and spaces for community use. A local committee run Cròileagan (nursery provision) from within the school. The new school at Portree has been designed with the same ethos of inclusivity and connectiveness within the community.

Increased economy of scale

All stand-alone schools have witnessed growing rolls, and as a result larger average class sizes than within GMU. With higher class sizes; cost/pupil drops; thereby creating more economically viable classes. This increased economy of scale can be seen if GMU and stand-alone schools are placed in direct comparison. However, it should be noted that any increased movement of children into Gaelic medium indicates a drop for English medium schools within the same locality where potential school roles are finite. A fully detailed cost-benefit analyses is out with the remit of this study and would need to be looked at within the local context.

Increased ability to deliver the Curriculum for Excellence

A common theme emerging from speaking with practitioners on the ground and at policy level was the recognition that delivering the Curriculum for Excellence to younger children required a different approach than for their English medium peers. Language acquisition is recognised as a vital pre-requisite in pre-school and early stage of primary. Teachers noted:

“For children in P1 for example, you need to teach the terminology of any topic before you can deliver it with any meaning.”

“Gaelic medium requires a tailored curriculum with a strong focus on language and play in Primary One and Two.”

Teaching staff spoke of the collegiate time spent in GMU on issues that were not wholly relevant to delivering GME. Additional time then needs to be spent by GMU staff to make the Curriculum for Excellence relevant:

“A Gaelic school would be better able to tailor the curriculum, teacher planning time and training for the needs of the pupils and staff.”

Results from survey

In a recent survey of GMU parents at Rockfield, parents were asked to consider some perceived benefits for a stand-alone school. 11 responses were received. 10 parents agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements; with one parent being unsure:

A stand-alone school would:

- Provide greater opportunities for kids to speak Gaelic outside the classroom
- Raise the profile of Gaelic in our community
- Ensure that children feel they are being treated equally to English medium counterparts
- Encourage new parents to take up the opportunity for GME
- Make a high level of fluency more easily achievable
- Create a strong Gaelic community

4.3 What are the measured benefits of Gaelic schools in other areas?

There are currently 6 Gaelic stand-alone schools in Scotland. They are listed below under their current names, in order of the year they opened:

1. 1999 – Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu (Glasgow) - Primary
2. 2006 – Sgoil Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu (Glasgow) - Primary & Secondary
3. 2007 – Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis (Inverness)
4. 2013 – Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce (Edinburgh)
5. 2015 – Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar (Fort William)
6. 2018 – Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh (Portree) – opened after the Easter holidays

For such a small data set, measurement of the benefits of Gaelic schools compared to Gaelic medium units is not robust at this stage.

Two years ago, Scottish Government started to gather data to measure attainment in all Scottish schools, which included identifiable data set for Gaelic schools. It is anticipated that in the future a robust data set will be available for analysis.

Without a robust set of data at local or national level, it is worth looking to how other countries have dealt with the issue.

“...evidence suggests that immersion in a second language through participation in an all-X school (all-French, all-Gaelic ... etc) enhances learners’ proficiency in the immersion language beyond what is possible in conventional immersion settings. It takes them nearer to native speaker levels, with no loss to their command of their first language or of other subject-matter that is taught at school.”
(Immersion in a second language at school, Richard Johnstone January 2002, Chapter 3)

In Ireland the norm is to build separate schools, only looking at units if the former is not possible. From a 2015 report on provision of Irish medium education:

“In contexts where it is not feasible to establish a stand-alone school, which can be the case at post primary level, due to insufficient demand, consideration should be given to the establishment of an Irish-medium unit. It was noted, however, during the case studies that the attachment of such a unit to an English-medium host school can constrain the capacity of the unit to establish its own identity and extend the opportunities for students to be immersed in the language outside of lessons, especially if the Irish-medium unit is accommodated within the building of the English-medium host school.”

(A Report on Irish-Medium Educational Provision in Gaeltacht Schools: Primary and post-Primary Case Studies, Department of Education and Skills 2015, page 38)

5 National Context

The 2011 Census showed that the council areas with the highest proportions of people able to speak Gaelic were: Na h-Eileanan Siar (52%), Highland (5%) and Argyll & Bute (4%).

The recent debate in Scottish Parliament on the National Gaelic Language Plan evidenced cross party support for its aims and outcomes.

The Scottish Government has 15 National Outcomes to which National and Local Gaelic Language Plans contribute.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig have recently produced their third National Gaelic Language Plan, 2018-2023. This plan sets out an intention to encourage

“the promotion, availability and growth of GME...” and an intention to “support parents and carers who want GME for their children and those who would like to see a GME school established in their area.”

(National Gaelic Language Plan, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2018-2023, page 46)

It clearly states an aim to

“increase the number of Gaelic schools from six to ten during the life of this Plan through capital funding initiatives from Scottish Government.”

(ibid, page 48)

And notes the:

“...planned increase of almost double the number of hours of free early years’ education and childcare to 30 hours a week for vulnerable 2-year-olds and all 3 and 4-year-olds by 2021 is a huge

opportunity for Gaelic medium education. So too is Gaelic medium education’s achievements in attainment, with the capacity to contribute to the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

(ibid page 21)

6 Local Context

Argyll and Bute Council has recently approved its third local Gaelic Language Plan, 2018-2022. Within the Action Plan, under the heading of “Increasing the Learning of Gaelic”, there is a commitment to: Under the One aim is to:

Investigate the option for a Gaelic School in Argyll.

(Local Gaelic Language Plan, Argyll and Bute Council, 2018-2022, page 26)

At their recent Business Day held in Oban, elected councillors for Argyll and Bute Council discussed a proposal for a Gaelic Cultural Centre which could incorporate a Primary School.

“Councillors of Oban Lorn and the Islands Area Committee are supportive of a Gaelic School as part of a centre encompassing the wider Gaelic culture. We feel this combination would be progressive and helpful when seeking funding.

We appreciate how important the Gaelic culture is to this area and the desire and commitment of the parents wishing this educational facility for their children. We also feel that as part of Gaelic Centre the school would be sustainable and afford the opportunity for the school numbers to rise, and the Gaelic culture to flourish.”

Robertson, E. (20th April 2018), stand-alone school feasibility study, [email]

6.1 Current provision

There are now 7 primary schools in Argyll and Bute that offer GME. The table below shows their school roll since 2013 with projections for this coming school year. The newest school, at Bunessan on Mull opened this year with three pupils enrolled. It is not included in table shown.

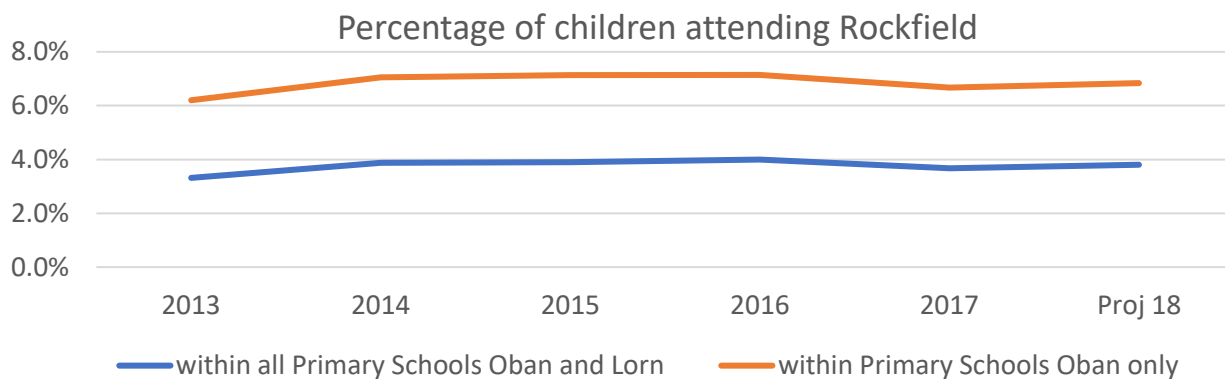
School Name	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Proj 18
Bowmore Primary Gaelic	21	23	21	19	17	13
Rockfield Gaelic	40	48	49	51	48	49
Salen Primary Gaelic	36	38	43	45	49	51
Sandbank Primary Gaelic	40	39	40	42	38	41
Strath of Appin Gaelic	4	3	5	5	5	4
Tiree Gaelic	22	23	28	23	31	35
Total GME	163	174	186	185	188	193

The following table and graph gives information for schools offering English medium education within Oban and Lorn. Schools included are: Achaleven, Barcaldine, Dalmally, Dunbeg, Easdale, Kilchrenan, Kilninver, Lochnell, Luing, Park, Rockfield, St. Columba’s, Strath of Appin and Taynuilt. These schools were included on the basis of likely ability (in terms of travel time) to access a stand-alone school in Oban.

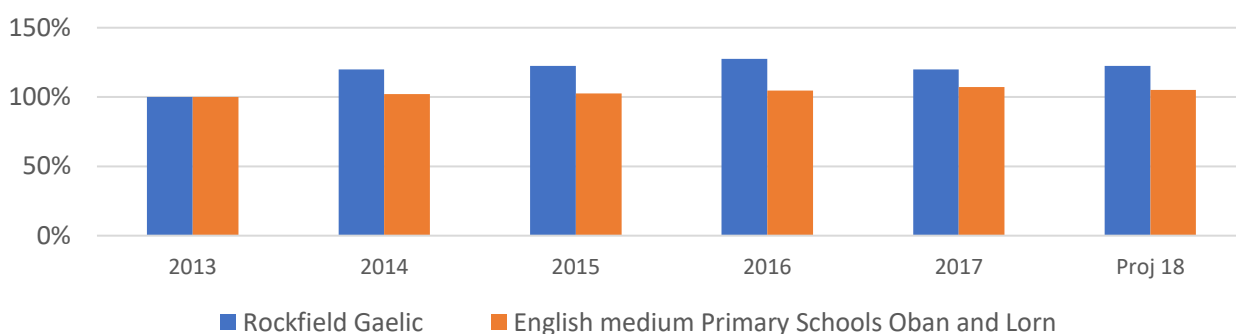
The total number of children in EME within Oban, Lorn can be shown as:

English medium Primary Schools in Oban and Lorn	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Proj 18
	1043	1066	1069	1091	1117	1096

What percentage of children are currently attending Rockfield GMU?



Taking enrolment in 2013 as 100%, the graph below shows the percentage variation for Rockfield compared with the above schools.



All children attending the Rockfield EME primary school learn Gaelic in class as part of their curriculum. This promotes an ethos of inclusion where Gaelic is celebrated across the whole school. It should be noted that the Head Teacher at Rockfield felt that having the GMU within the school was wholly positive. She explained that there was cross resourcing of staff resources for French, Gaelic and music in addition to resourcing of non-contact time cover. She felt that there were benefits of changing to a stand-alone school from Gaelic medium perspective but not the mainstream perspective.

More generally within Argyll and Bute, the council encourages all primary schools across the authority to study Gaelic. Languages in schools are either listed as L2 or L3. For the Oban cluster schools there is an increasing number switching to Gaelic as L2 rather than French from P5-P7. Oban High School offers Gaelic as L2 or L3. All schools have access to the online resource- [Go!Gaelic](#).

For Early Years, consultation with the Education Department indicated that they are exploring three themes to fulfil increased provision requirements. It would only be once these themes were exhausted that any new provision would be considered. The three themes for increased delivery of service are: Outdoor; Partnership; and Culture.

It is worth noting that during a consultation with one of the early year providers in Oban, the opinion was expressed that facilities could be made available for Cròileagan and Sgoil-Àraich.

6.2 Catchment area

There is no official catchment area delineated by Argyll and Bute Council for the Gaelic medium unit. The current cohort include children from Kilmelford, Taynuilt and Benderloch.

As with all Primary Education, any children further than 2 miles from the school or outwith a safe walking route get help from school transport to facilitate their child’s attendance.

6.3 Why Oban? Cultural and historical context

Oban is widely considered to be the logical place for the first stand-alone school in Argyll. Oban boasts a strong Gaelic community including the well-established Gaelic medium unit at Rockfield (established 1997); Furan Gaelic Centre; and an ever-growing Fèisean movement. It is an attractive place to live and work and is central within the Lorn area. Oban has shown a continual growth in population since records began in 1755. It also serves as a gateway to the Isles, with proximity to Ionad Chalum Chille Ìle, the Gaelic medium college on Islay.

Furan

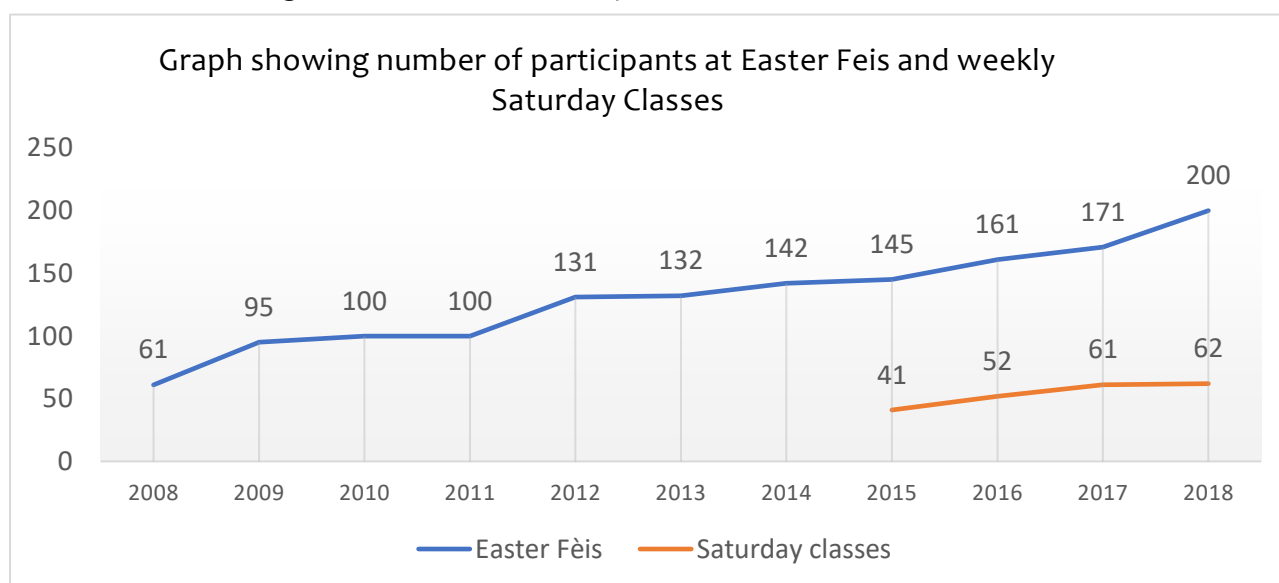
Many activities are run from Furan, including children’s book group, parental Gaelic classes, conversation classes and Book Bug. The Development Officer, Duncan MacNeil also does outreach work within Oban and Lorn and plays a crucial role in extending language opportunities for existing Gaelic medium facilities.

Mòd

Oban is the birthplace of the National Mòd. The first three national Mòds were held in the town from 1892-4. Since then, it has returned home regularly. Oban High School has a specialised school of traditional music. This was launched as a 12-week pilot project in 2013, but due to its popularity it now runs for the full academic year. Residential tutors for this school crossover as tutors for the Fèis, creating generational links. Other examples of cross generational activities are the nationally renowned Oban and Taynuilt Gaelic choirs and the ceilidhs that are held at Lynn Court residential home which benefits from many of the budding, amateur and professional musicians mentioned above. Lynn Court residents particularly enjoy the primary school pupils coming along to play music or recite poetry.

Fèis

The Fèis movement is a group of Gaelic arts tuition festivals, mainly for young people, which take place throughout Scotland. At Fèis individuals come together to develop skills in the Gaelic arts – song, dance, drama, and traditional music on a wide range of instruments. The 2018 Fèis Latharna (Lorne Fèis, hosted on the Oban Joint Primary Campus, was the biggest one to date. Due to requests from parents, the Fèis Bheag (for 5 to 7-year olds) was established this year with 25 participants. The main Fèis played host to 175 children benefitting from over 30 tutors, many of whom are local.



NB: Fèis numbers for 2008 to 2015 are based on income received

Due to popular demand, Saturday weekly classes started in 2015. These are held at the Glencruitten Church Centre. Both the main Fèis, which started in 1994, and the Saturday classes are now operating at full capacity for their respective venues.

Oban University Town Project

The Oban University Town Project was established in August 2017 and launched in 2018 with the following aspirational vision

“We will develop Oban as a University Town that will focus on the distinctive assets and employment opportunities of the area and provide an outstanding experience for students and staff in terms of teaching, practical work, enterprise, leisure and cultural activities and community engagement. This will contribute to the economic and population growth of the area by attracting and retaining young people and qualified staff and enhance creativity, innovation, and the formation and growth of local businesses”

Oban: A University Town Project Scoping and Consultation Document Vision and Strategic Objectives, page 2

In an interview, Donald MacLean, the volunteer chair of The Oban University Town Project, said

“I’m not sure that we currently do full justice to our cultural heritage here in Oban. A Gaelic hub or centre encompassing a school would not only mean greater opportunities for people to study the language and culture locally, it would also be a huge attraction for visitors and for people interested in living in the area. In my mind I think of ‘University’ in a very broad sense. Our University Town project should be engaging with people from nursery to post retirement. Healthy communities involve people of all ages, so a primary school could play a key role in sustaining a healthy Gaelic community.”

Partnerships

A new school has the potential for many exciting partnerships within the town. Crucially, the town can now start to benefit from home-grown teachers, as the first cohort of the GMU graduate as primary school teachers themselves.

Gaelic culture is alive and well in Oban.

7 Is it Feasible?

7.1 Is there demand?

Two surveys were conducted over a 4-week period. The first survey--which was targeted at people with children but could be filled out by anyone--was issued:

- Via social media, posted onto a variety of relevant local community sites
- Face to face at Toy Cupboard sessions; Noah's Ark baby and toddler group and at the soft play area at Atlantis Leisure Centre
- One primary school and 5 nurseries helped to distribute either with hard copies or via social media

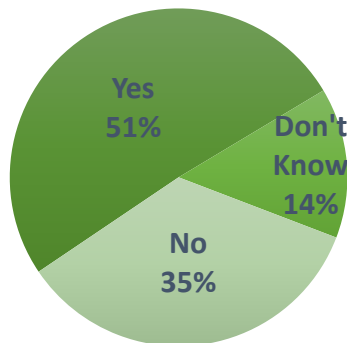
118 responses were received: 65 from social media; 54 face to face and 3 received by post.

The second survey was designed specifically for the parents and guardians of children currently attending Gaelic medium units either at Rockfield or Strath of Appin. It repeated the original questions but went into more depth for reasons and thinking behind the issues.

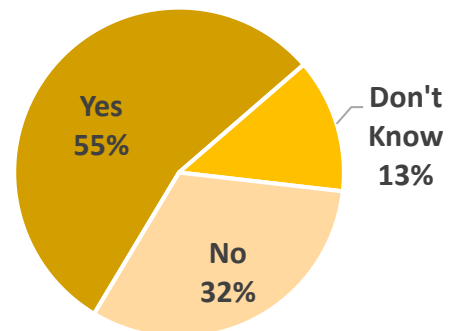
11 responses were received for this survey.

Top level results:

General response to "Would you consider sending your child to a Gaelic stand-alone school?"

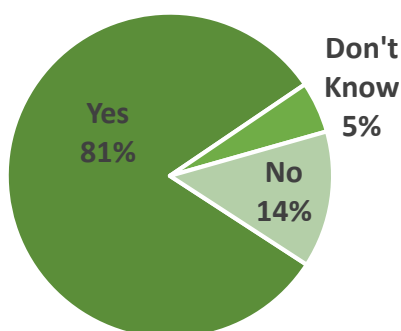


The GMU parents responded 100% positively to this question. The combined response across both surveys is therefore:

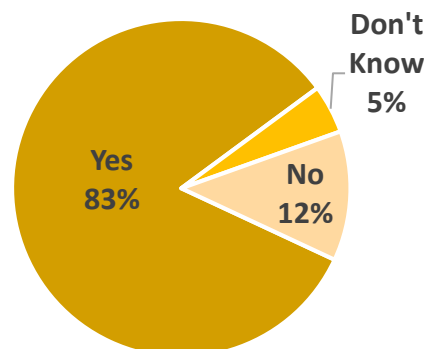


Respondents who answered No or Don't know to the above question were asked if they would support the right of others to have this choice for their family. Of the 58 respondents in this category, 36 thought others should have the right; 16 disagreed; and 6 said they don't know. Combining this with those who would consider a school for themselves, gives the following:

General response to "Are you in favour of a school for yourself or others"



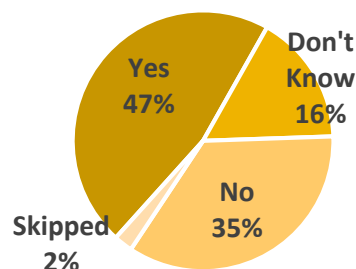
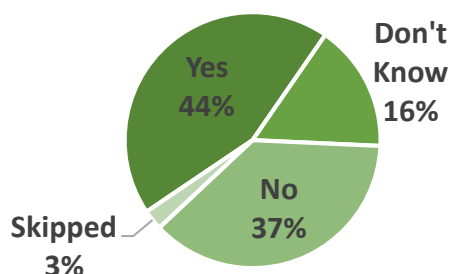
The combined response with GMU parents shows:



Participants were also asked about their interest in a stand-alone nursery, and whether wraparound care would affect their choices. (Wraparound care extends the hours of care to enable parents to work a full day.)

General response to "Would you consider sending your child to a stand-alone nursery?"

The GMU parents responded over 70% positively to this question. The combined response across both surveys is therefore:



- 34% of respondents across both surveys stated that wraparound care would affect their choice of schooling.
- This rises to 41% and 46% respectively if you look at parents who have said yes to sending their kids to a Gaelic nursery and then a Gaelic school.

Who filled out the general survey?

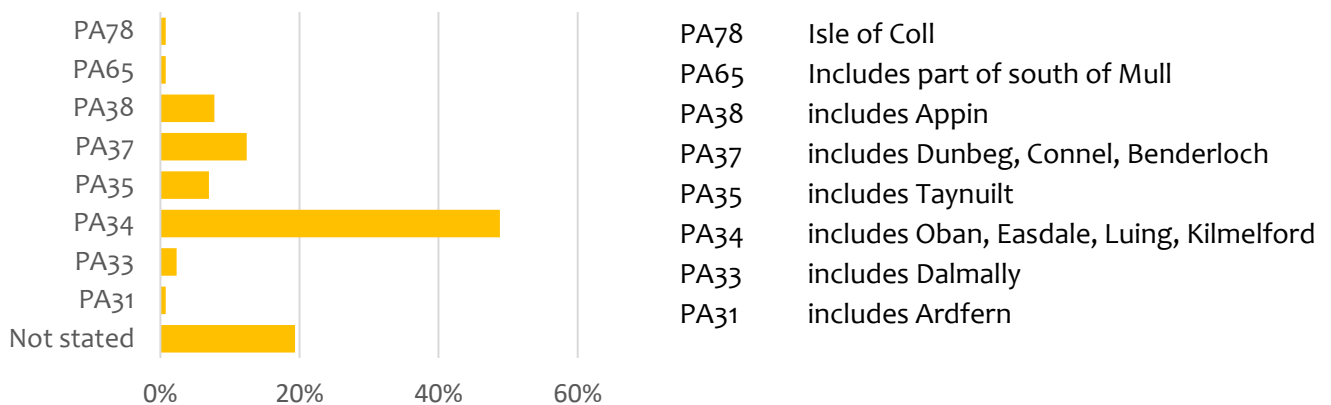
As described previously, the general survey was made available through a variety of media, enabling anyone in our communities to take part. The focus of distribution was to parents of children 11 years and under. Effort was made to gather the opinions of those parents and guardians with pre-school children as it would be this cohort that is most likely to benefit from any future provision. It is notable that parents and guardians who have not yet committed to a Primary School for their children displayed higher levels of interest and support for a Gaelic school.

- 63 or 53% of respondents stated they had kids age 0-2 and/or kids age 3-4
Of this cohort:
 - 54% said they would consider sending their child to a Gaelic school (3% higher than general response)
 - 90% said they were in favour of a school for themselves or others
- 56 or 49% of respondents have children in Primary School (18 or 15% of whom also have kids 4 years and under)
Of this cohort:
 - 41% said they would consider sending their child to a Gaelic school (10% lower than general response)
 - 77% said they were in favour of a school for themselves or others
- 8 or 7% of respondents stated that they do not have children; 7 or 86% of this cohort were in favour of a stand-alone Gaelic school; 6 of the 8 in this category are under the age of 34,

What postcodes were covered by both survey responses?

Respondents to both surveys were asked to fill in their postcode information

Graph showing percentage distribution of respondents against postcodes



Further analyses of general responses

Respondents were asked a series of questions which asked about current awareness or understanding of Gaelic medium education within the Curriculum for Excellence, local availability and access, and support available for parents.

As would be expected, responses that indicated good awareness, generally showed a more positive attitude towards a Gaelic school. The questions that caused the largest variation were centred around understanding of Curriculum for Excellence and support for parents.

Looking at comments associated with the main question “Would you consider sending your child to a stand-alone Gaelic school?”:

Of the 60 respondents who indicated Yes, comments fell into the following categories:

- Desire to develop knowledge and awareness of language, culture and history (15)
- Appreciating the wider benefits of bilingualism (14)
- Coming from a Gaelic-speaking family (10)
- To enable complete immersion (5)
- Bringing Gaelic to an equal standing as English
- Other comments included the benefits of a smaller school
- One respondent caveated their “yes” with “as long as English was used alongside”

Of the 58 respondents who indicated either No or Don’t Know, comments fell into the following categories:

- Not having Gaelic in the family/concern over support for homework (8)
- Strongly against the concept, ie waste of money, against segregated schools (8)
- Travel implications (8)
- English is already a second language; other languages may be more useful; Gaelic not relevant for future locations (8)
- Concerns over attainment in primary and follow through to secondary; not convinced that total immersion is best (5)
- Already committed to a Primary School (5)
- Currently attending GMU and happy with crossover with English medium

Summary of demand

- 83% of respondents said they are in favour of a stand-alone school for themselves or others
 - This comes down to 81% if you take away the GMU parent responses
- 55% of respondents said that they would consider sending their child(ren) to a Gaelic stand-alone school
 - This comes down to 51% if you take away the GMU parent responses

The current enrolment at Rockfield GMU represents just over 3% of all children attending schools (named previously) within Oban and Lorn. The 55% or 51% noted above is a significant increase.

What does this mean?

The projected roll of the English medium schools noted above = 1096 for 2018/19

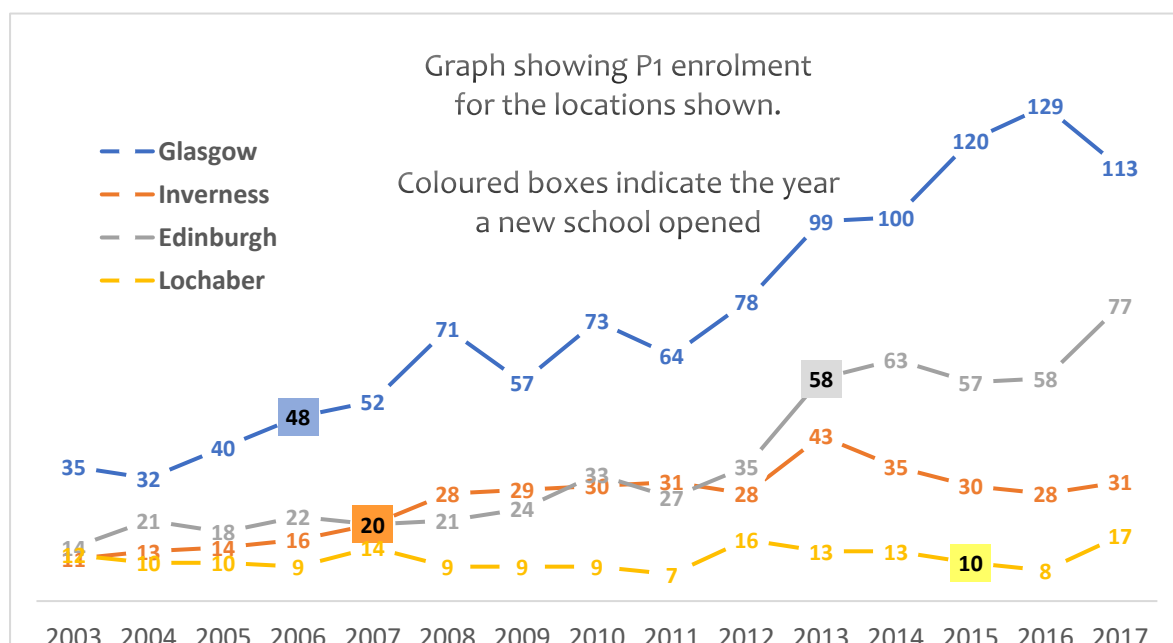
If a Gaelic stand-alone school existed today—considering those families already accessing GMU—demand shown in the survey theoretically equates to over 500 pupils in a stand-alone school.

Attaining such a high number would seem unlikely, and it is worth noting that any growth would be incremental as the increase in enrolment would occur at P1/P2 level only, unless a child is already a fluent Gaelic speaker. Therefore, the effect on existing school rolls would be minimised year on year.

Common themes have emerged during this consultation which may explain this significant increase in potential enrolment. These are captured in the benefits section above. In addition, a common thread throughout discussions with parents and practitioners is that the current GMU has served the community well and has been a fantastic opportunity, but now is the time to make the next leap with greater sense of equality and gravitas for the Gaelic language.

7.2 Is there evidence to show ongoing demand?

Evidence from other local authorities shows that where there has been a stand-alone school built, then demand grows over the years. Graph below shows P1 enrolment only.



Results from the survey conducted as part of this study showed demand for a stand-alone school from parents with children across all ages.

The highest percentage of parents expressing a desire for a stand-alone school (not including those already in GMU) was parents of 0-2 year olds.

It is worth noting that while the rolls for Rockfield and Strath of Appin GMU are virtually static, evidence above--and knowledge of other countries experiences with minority languages--shows that the establishment of a stand-alone school leads to growing numbers.

7.3 Will there be teachers?

Anecdotal evidence shows a fear of lack of Gaelic teachers. This is expressed by respondents regardless of whether they're in favour of a stand-alone school or not.

The fear is obviously understandable with the current situation in Bunessan on Mull speaking volumes. An attempt was made to place the lack of Gaelic teachers within the context of lack of teachers nationwide for English medium education. Finite data to show this was not easily available in terms of numbers of teachers within both mediums set against numbers of posts available. However, available evidence demonstrates that people leaving teaching do so for the same reasons, regardless of GME/ EME ie stagnant wages and increasing workload.

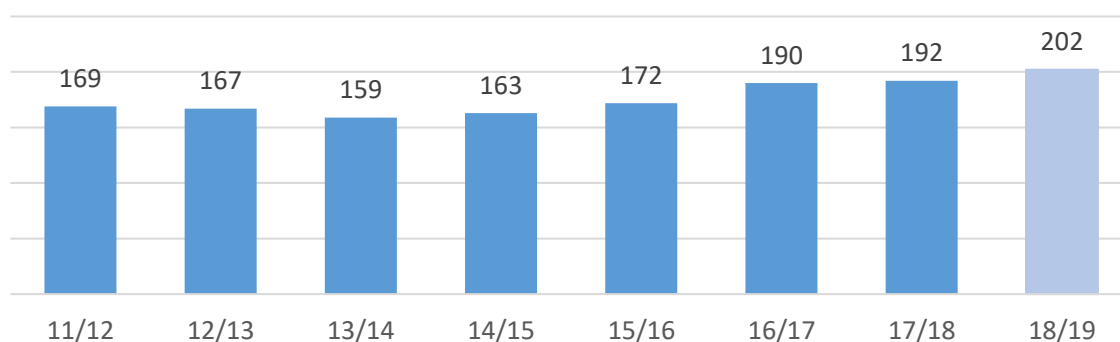
Teacher supply: past, present and future

It is worth noting the cyclical nature of this issue, ie small numbers learning Gaelic lead to a small body of people who may go into teaching. The rise in GME will lead to a larger cohort of potential teachers from Early Years to Secondary schools. The requirement for an over-supply of GME teachers has not been a pre-requisite for the establishment of six stand-alone schools in Scotland.

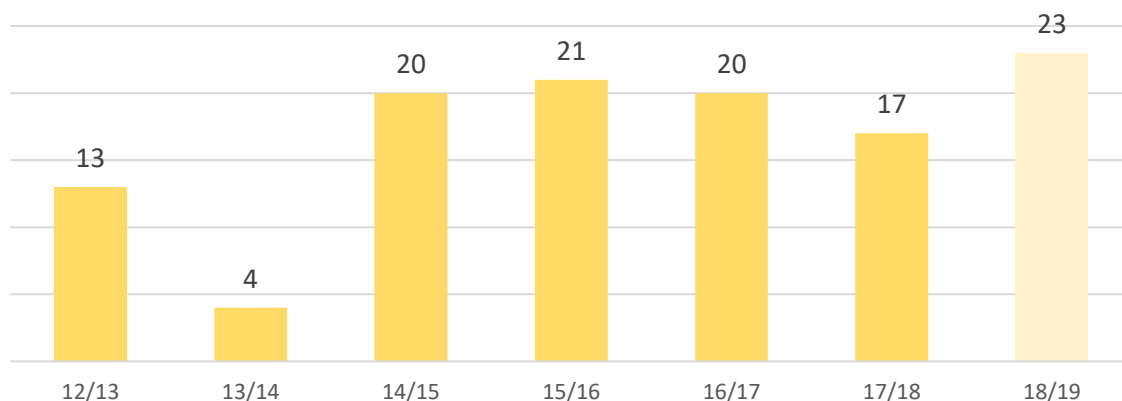
It can be demonstrated, however, with data from Bòrd na Gàidhlig, that teachers for Gaelic medium education are on the rise:

Graph showing Gaelic medium teachers, FTE, Primary school

Projection shown for 18/19 based on 3-year trend with no allowance for increased provision



Graph showing Newly Qualified Gaelic medium teachers,
Primary school
Projection shown for 18/19 based on anticipated numbers



This trend is encouraging and can be expected to continue with commitment at national level to increase the cohort of Gaelic medium teachers:

“Gaelic Teaching and Support Staff: Our aim is to support the growth of Gaelic education. With this we must also maintain a consistent emphasis on supporting the training and recruitment of teachers and other staff for Gaelic in schools and early years.”

(National Gaelic Language Plan, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2018-2023, page 31)

What is changing?

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig in partnership with the University of the Highlands & Islands started a new degree course for teachers in Sept 2017 with an intake of 7 students. The intake for Sept 2018 is currently 9. Students can become either Primary or Secondary qualified through this course, and it is suitable for both learners & fluent speakers.

Students who have come up through Gaelic medium education are now coming out the other end as fully trained teachers. We have two examples of this in Argyll with teachers at Appin and Rockfield

Practitioners are being pro-active about the teaching gap. E-Sgoil is a Stornoway-based service offering lessons in Gaelic medium. Lessons can be beamed into any classroom in Scotland and has been used with success recently in Bunessan:

“The aim of extending the delivery of key subjects through the medium of Gaelic by e-Sgoil will be supported. This will be seen as additionality and not as replacing traditional methods.

(National Gaelic Language Plan, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2018-2023, page 49)

Rural issues... or not

Anecdotally, the issue of placements for newly qualified teachers, or probationers is presenting itself as particular to Oban’s rural situation. Probationer teachers have no say over where they go, apart from choosing their preferred council areas. As the GMUs within Argyll are spread far and wide—with some on islands—it seems that young teachers are hesitant to list Argyll as they are concerned about their accessibility to family and friends.

Perhaps there is an opportunity to review this set up, thereby making coming to Argyll a more attractive proposition.

From the information available, and in discussion with Bòrd na Gàidhlig staff it does not seem that the lack of teachers is particularly worse in the rural areas.

Will a stand-alone school be more attractive to teachers?

Teachers currently working in GME stated that if they had the choice they would prefer to work in a stand-alone school. Reasons given are captured in the benefits section, 4.2 above.

7.4 Is there an appropriate location?

Information from the council

Following discussion with the Chief Executive of Argyll and Bute Council, officers were tasked with helping the development of this study in terms of costs. Within this, potential sites were looked at with the following findings:

“There are no identified development sites in the town and Oban is constrained both by topography and ground conditions. If a green field site is required for a new primary school consideration would need to be given to areas outside of Oban such as Dunbeg. However, it should be pointed out that the council does not own any appropriate land at Dunbeg, so still unable to give an indicative price for land.

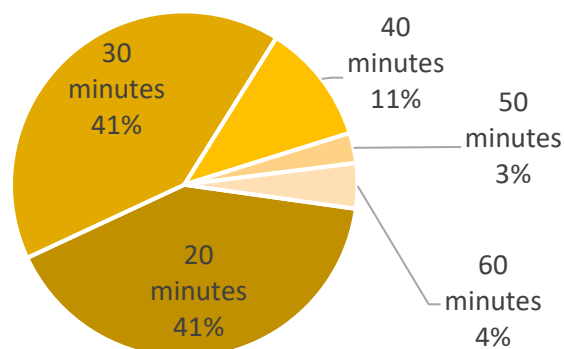
Brief of Requirement for potential stand-alone Gaelic school in Oban – indicative costings, Community Services Department, page 4

The report went on to note that neither of the two vacant primary schools at Ardchattan and Ardchonnell would be suitable to meet the brief for the school.

Information from the survey

Respondents to both surveys (total 129 responses) were asked “...how long a journey would you be happy for your kids to make?”

Of those who said they would consider sending their child(ren) to a stand-alone school, the answers shown were given.



A road map of the area was reviewed, and several places identified as being within a 20-minute journey from Oban. Based on population densities, it was decided to focus attention on areas north of Oban.

Argyll and Bute Council’s Local Development Plan, Proposals Map (adopted March 2015) was reviewed. Within this document are maps of all the areas within Oban and Lorn showing areas such as Wild Land, Special Protection Areas, Potential Development Areas and Rural Opportunity Areas. The following information was gleaned:

Area	map No	available	notes
Barcaldine	156	PDA	3 PDA sites available plus 1 x ROA; 10 mins from Strath of Appin
Benderloch	159	PDA	2 PDA sites; 3 allocations; 15 mins from Strath of Appin
Connel	168	PDA, ROA	2 PDA sites, 1 ROA; 1 allocation
Dunbeg	178	PDA, ROA	2 PDA sites 9 allocations
Fearnoch	182	ROA	large ROA; access?
Kilninver	194	PDA	2 PDA sites: out of preferred time frame for those outside Oban
North Connel	200	PDA, ROA	2 PDA, large ROA and one allocation
Oban East	203	PDA	5 PDA sites; access??
Oban south	204	PDA	4 PDA sites and numerous allocations;
Taynuilt	216	PDA	1 PDA site

Journey times between these locations was also checked to be within 20 minutes journey time, shown in table below.

Area	Travel times			
	Oban	Taynuilt	Kilninver	Benderloch
Barcaldine	21	22	34	7
Benderloch	15	16	27	
Connel	10	11	24	7
Dunbeg	6	14	20	9
Fearnoch	17	6	31	14
Kilninver	17	33		27
North Connel	12	14	25	5
Oban East	5	21	15	17
Oban south	5	26	10	20
Taynuilt	20		33	16

Further information from the council

The Estates section of the council further provided information on land the council owns in the following areas:

- Taynuilt
- Connel
- North Connel
- Dunbeg
- Benderloch

See Appendix B for details

Issues:

It should be noted that realistic journey times for children should be reviewed. One parent noted that once you take into account multiple pick-ups/drop offs the time taken to travel a relatively short distance can be much longer than expected.

The Forestry Commission is being decommissioned as of March 2019. This may present an opportunity for purchase of land.

Further investigation is required into the above areas.

7.5 How much would it cost?

Until a model for delivery is agreed, there is too much potential variation on the community element of the building to make detailed costings useful or relevant.

Capital costs

Costs for provision of a school were pursued in terms of comparative costs with recent school builds in the area. The information shown below has been drawn from the council's indicative costing report referred to above. See Appendix C for full report.

Council officers were presented with a brief showing two potential sizes:

- Capacity for 125 pupils with 5 composite classes
- Capacity for 175 pupils with 7 individual classes

Comparative costs provided are based on capacity for 125 pupils, 5 classrooms

These excerpts should be read with the following understanding:

- Until a suitable site is identified total construction costs cannot unfortunately be estimated.
- Costs are shown for basic school requirements only (ie not the aspirational model of a Gaelic Cultural Centre)
- Information given is based on a significant number of assumptions. What follows should only ever be considered as indicative of what a school of this size could cost to build and operate
- The design brief for the new Kirn Primary school was used as a comparator for the proposed layout and scaled down accordingly

School	Gross Internal Floor Area	£/m ²	
Oban High School	15,296	2,327	Note economy of scale
Campbeltown Grammar	8,288	3,053	
Kirn Primary School	3,142	3,253	

- Cost of building a school with capacity for 125 pupils would therefore be in the region of £5.8M.
- Additional costs include:
 - External areas such as parking, pickup/drop off points
 - Outdoor areas and Multi Use Games Area (if required)
 - Acquiring and servicing the site
 - Professional fees generally considered to be around 15% of works costs
 - An allowance for any site specific “abnormals”

As Morag Brown, Business Improvement Manager, Argyll and Bute Council states in the council report, “The information is merely for illustrative purposes and there are additional considerations which would affect total project costs including inflation and tender price index.”

Running Costs

School operating budgets are based on factors including the size of the school roll and the number of teaching staff. Again, costs for running the school were based on comparison with similar schools in the area. The table below shows revenue costs for two existing schools. School A is slightly larger, with 6 classes, and School B is slightly smaller than the Gaelic stand-alone school proposed.

School Name	2017/18 Primary budget	2017/18 Pre-5 budget	Departmental Admin Expenditure	Total
School A	524,888	91,671	40,495	£657,054
School B	396,474	71,642	33,671	£501,787

As noted in section 7.1, the roll for a stand-alone school would increase incrementally, mostly with P1 intake.

8 How Could This work?

8.1 Deciding a model for delivery

There are basically three models that could be followed. The first would be to deliver a Primary School and Sgoil-Àraich only; the second would be to place such a school within the context of wider community use as a Gaelic Cultural Centre. The third would be a compromise option within the first two whereby there is some community space within the school (as per examples in Lochaber and Portree) but the predominant use is as a school.

Primary School and Sgoil-Àraich only

Such a venture would be the sole responsibility of the local authority. It would fulfil the benefits named above but would miss an opportunity for partnership working. On a very practical level it would require less floor space and therefore be the cheaper option.

Gaelic Cultural Centre to include a Primary School and Sgoil-Àraich

This model is the most aspirational. Not only would it meet the demand as expressed in the survey for this study, but it would also fulfil the wider aspirations as expressed by the Oban University Town project and the intentions expressed by councillors.

Primary School and Sgoil-Àraich with some community space

This model can use Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh (Portree) and Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar (Fort William) as role models where office space has been provided for organisations such as Bòrd na Gàidhlig. This model could also fulfil many of the aspirations expressed by Oban University Town project and enable creative partnerships to be developed. At Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar, for example, Cròileagan (Gaelic medium nursery provision) is provided by a local community group whereas at Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce (Edinburgh) a private company leases space to run full wraparound care and nursery.

8.2 Where could the money come from?

Specific Grants for Gaelic Education

The funding for this project could come from a combination of sources but would include monies from the local council and the Scottish Government:

'Local authorities have an important role in the promotion of Gaelic in Scotland. The level and range of provision varies depending on the profile of Gaelic in the different council areas. The Scottish Government provides a scheme of Specific Grants for Gaelic Education to ensure that the development of Gaelic education continues to expand and is prioritised, which currently totals £4.482m in 2018-19. Authorities may also apply for capital funding for infrastructure related to the provision of Gaelic education. There will be £4m available under this scheme in 2018-19.'

Information obtained from Scottish Government website and updated by Scottish Government Gaelic team.

Funding for resources:

In addition to funding available to all schools such as the Pupil Equity Fund or STEM funding, Gaelic medium schools benefit from free ongoing availability of resource from Stòrlann.

Third Sector

Depending on the agreed model of delivery, a variety of third sector funds could also become available from funders who specialise in Arts, Heritage and Culture. If the facility offered cross-generational educational opportunities this would open the purse strings of other funders.

At this stage it was decided it would be ineffectual to produce a list of potential funders as agreement is required for the model of delivery. Suffice to say there are many funders out there who would gladly support a project demonstrating partnership working between public and third sector.

Argyll Deal Fund

In a recent meeting with councillors, the Argyll Deal Fund was discussed as a potential source of funding for a Gaelic Cultural Centre which would encompass a Primary School and Sgoil-Àraich.

Private businesses

It should also be noted that there would be greater ability to access support from businesses if this was developed as more than a school project.

Income Generation

If the second or third model including community space are taken forward, there is an opportunity for income generation from organisations such as: Comunn Gàidhealach an Òbain; Fèis Latharna (potential Sat classes); Bòrd na Gàidhlig; BBC Alba and Cròileagan provider. Income could also be generated by holding classes, events and activities within a Gaelic Cultural Centre covering a range of interests and ages.

However, it also needs to be recognised that school provision is a statutory service. The running costs for any school need to be identified from within the council budget (or revenue support from Scottish Government) and cannot rely on sources external to these.

9 What are the Next Steps?

For this to progress, Comann nam Pàrant an Òbain should request that the Local Authority conduct a public consultation.

It is acknowledged that finance will be a hurdle, but the group strongly feels that a stand-alone school—sitting within a wider Gaelic Cultural Centre-- would be of huge benefit to the area culturally, economically and educationally.

With support from the Scottish Government and potential other funders, this will be a huge asset for our area.

It is time for Argyll to be able to boast of its first stand-alone Gaelic school.