

Developing Online Resources for Learning Scottish Gaelic: Turning compliance into opportunity

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Abstract

Gaelic is a Celtic language which has been spoken in Scotland since the 6th century. Today it is spoken by approximately 58,000 people across Scotland and in communities around the world. In recognition of the value and importance of Gaelic to Scotland's culture, heritage and identity, the Scottish Parliament passed the Gaelic Language Act (2005). The Act included the establishing of a public body, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, charged with the preservation and promotion of Gaelic and the preparation of the National Plan for Gaelic.

The Act also requires more than fifty Scottish public organisations to prepare and implement a language plan of their own, addressing the needs and opportunities for using Gaelic with their customers and the resulting development needs for their employees. These organisations are being invited, in tranches, to develop their plans, with priority given to those who will have the largest impact on the language and its speakers within Scotland.

Cànan (Scottish Gaelic for 'language'), the Company owned by Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Scotland's Gaelic college, has researched, developed and delivered bespoke online resources and tools to support public organisations to meet the aims of their Gaelic Language Plan. These organisations range from the economic development organisation, Highlands and Islands Enterprise to the lifeline ferry company, Caledonian MacBrayne.

This paper explores the research, decisions made and development concepts and processes involved in creating Gaelic learner opportunities as online resources and ensuring they are effective and appropriate to the specific needs of each organisation. It also identifies some challenges faced and some successes enjoyed.

The paper addresses eight key areas as follows:

1. Motivation: why is Cànan developing online language learning resources?
2. Aspiration: what does Cànan hope to achieve?
3. Learner personas: who are the learners and what are their needs?
4. Challenges: what challenges are we facing?
5. Solutions: what solutions are being provided?
6. Case studies: who are the clients and what works for them?
7. Evaluation: how is progress being measured?
8. Transnational cooperation – are there opportunity for joint working?