

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	5
Report No	G/18/25

Committee: Gaelic

Date: 19 November 2025

Report Title: Gaelic Education Update

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - People

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on key developments in Gaelic education across Highland, with a particular focus on strategic actions aligned to the Highland Council's Gaelic Language Plan and Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education.

It highlights progress towards securing Gaelic Medium provision at Lochaline Primary School and outlines the development of the Gaelic education in-service programme as a targeted response to the statutory duty placed on education authorities.

- 1.2 This report also outlines how insights from the recent Highland Council Gaelic conference on economic outcomes are being used to inform the agenda for teacher professional learning.

The conference highlighted the socio-economic value of Gaelic education and its role in community sustainability, employment, and cultural identity.

These learnings are now being embedded as next steps into professional development planning to ensure that educators have a broader understanding of the economic and societal impact of Gaelic Medium Education.

This strategic alignment of GLP outcomes supports the development and delivery high-quality Gaelic provision across Highland.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Note the progress towards securing Gaelic Medium provision in Lochaline Primary school;
- ii. Note the development of the Gaelic education in-service programme as a strategic response to the *Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education*, which places a duty on education authorities to support high-quality Gaelic provision; and

- iii. Note the contribution of events such as the In-service and Oideas podcast series in marking the 40-year milestone of Gaelic Medium Education (GME), and to support continued engagement with reflective and practitioner-led initiatives that strengthen the visibility and impact of Gaelic education in Highland.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource - For the financial year 2025/26 the Council submitted a Gaelic Specific Grant (GSG) application for £1.3M against total projected expenditure of £8.3M and was awarded £940,000. The funding provided by the Scottish Government through the GSG provides invaluable support for a wide range of projects that assist the Council in delivering its commitments under the Gaelic Language Plan with the majority dedicated to the delivery of Gaelic Medium and Gaelic Learner Education. In addition to core Council funding and the GSG, the Gaelic budget also secures additional funding through project-specific bids to Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and the Strategic Gaelic Plan Fund (GPF).
- 3.2 Legal - The Highland Council has a statutory duty to implement its Gaelic Language Plan in terms of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act of 2005. Section 15 Education (Scotland) Act 2016 imposes a statutory duty on all Education Authorities to promote and support Gaelic Education.
- 3.3 Risk - There are no risk implications arising from this report.
- 3.4 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people) - There are no Health and Safety implications arising from this report.
- 3.5 Gaelic - The report supports Gaelic Education development within The Highland Council area and the implementation of The Highland Council's Gaelic Language Plan and the National Plan.

4. Impacts

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.
- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 This is an update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5. Lochaline Gaelic Medium Primary Education request update

- 5.1 Highland Council received a GMPE request from 4 parents at Lochaline Primary School on 6 November 2023. The Council considered the need for GMPE in line with Guidance Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education as part of the initial assessment. The Guidance sets out the steps education authorities must take to assess demand on receipt of a request for GME. Where any education authority determines that

there is a potential need for GMPE in the GMPE assessment area, it has two possible options, it can:

1. Carry out a full assessment of the need for GMPE in the GMPE assessment area; or
2. without carrying out a full assessment, exercise its discretion to take such steps as are necessary to secure the provision of such GMPE as it considers appropriate in the GMPE assessment area.

5.2 The response to the initial assessment recommended that Highland Council “secure provision of GMPE” as the next steps in response to the statutory request. In agreement with parents, the Council proceeded to recruitment with the aim of securing provision with a commencement date of August 2025, due to the primary 1 enrolment dates of the children requesting GME. In the interim period, access to Gaelic medium immersion in the early years provision was provided as additional resource to Lochaline Early Learning and Childcare. This was with the aim to ensure a positive experience and to support transition in the Early Level experiences and outcomes, before establishing primary GME from August 2025.

5.3 Despite a series of recruitment advertisements, the Council has been unable to secure a permanent Gaelic Medium Education (GME) teacher for Lochaline Primary School, presenting a significant challenge to establishing provision. Senior officers have maintained regular engagement with parents and the Head Teacher to ensure transparent communication and continued support. In the spirit of partnership working, Comann nam Pàrant — statutory consultees in the full assessment process — were invited to participate in these discussions, despite this not being a formal requirement.

5.4 To strengthen support, Acharacle Primary School’s senior management team, who successfully developed GME as recognised by HMIE inspection, have been included as a peer partner in the process of establishing GME. In the interim, GME supply teachers are delivering part-time, in-person provision while recruitment continues. This is further enhanced by Gaelic community input from the Highland Council’s 0–3 Gaelic Play Leader, peer learning visits to Acharacle’s Gaelic classroom, Gaelic speaking parent support, and hybrid online teaching experiences.

These combined efforts reflect the Council’s commitment to securing sustainable GME provision. This also supports the wider strategic aims of Gaelic education in alignment with the strategic priorities of the GLP.

5.5 Officers and the Head Teacher will continue to meet regularly with parents to keep them informed and updated on the outcomes of the recruitment process. Updates on steps to secure provision of Gaelic Medium Education will continue to be shared with the Scottish Government and partners.

6. Gaelic Medium Professional Learning 2025/26

6.1 The Gaelic Literacy Development

6.1.1 The Development Officer has been working closely with Professor Will Lamb and June Graham from the University of Edinburgh on their project Recognising Children’s Speech, which has been funded by Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the Scottish Government. This project aims to develop an automatic speech recognition system that can be used as an assistive tool to support Gaelic Medium pupils in their

learning. The aim of the research is to use computers to recognise children's Gaelic speech to expand the technological support available to children in Gaelic Medium Education. To support the development of this ASR system, we will be assisting Professor Lamb and June Graham with the task of recording the voices of around 100 pupils from across Highland schools. This will then enable the team to obtain a variety of speakers of different ages, dialects and fluency.

- 6.1.2 The team have collaborated with the company Everway, who developed Read&Write. Eventually, it is hoped that the transcription system will be available to all of Scotland's schools through this partnership. The technology will enhance literacy support available in Gaelic medium by recognising and responding to spoken Gaelic, offering pupils new ways to engage with reading and writing in Gaelic for the first time. Thereby leading to long-term benefits in education for Gaelic Medium pupils.

6.2 Gaelic Medium Professional Learning Inservice

- 6.2.1 Education officers have met to discuss the universal plan for support towards professional learning for Gaelic Medium teachers this session. Targeted professional learning is ongoing and provided throughout the session for both Gaelic Literacy outcomes and 1 plus 2 program outcomes.

- 6.2.2 A plan for the 1day inservice has been developed in response to the expectations set out in the *Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education*, which places a duty on education authorities and relevant bodies to support the development and delivery of high-quality Gaelic education. A key aspect of this guidance is the provision of career-long professional learning (CLPL) for teachers working in Gaelic Medium Education (GME) and Gaelic Learner Education (GLE).

The guidance recognises the importance of enabling teachers to;

- Develop and maintain fluency and literacy in Gaelic.
- Access ongoing professional development tailored to the needs of Gaelic education.
- Strengthen leadership and planning capacity within Gaelic provision.

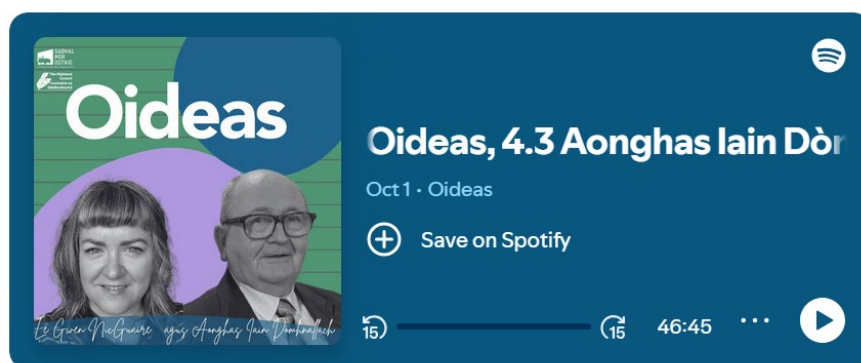
The inservice aims to support these objectives by offering professional learning opportunities, fostering collaboration, and enhancing confidence and quality in delivering Gaelic education.

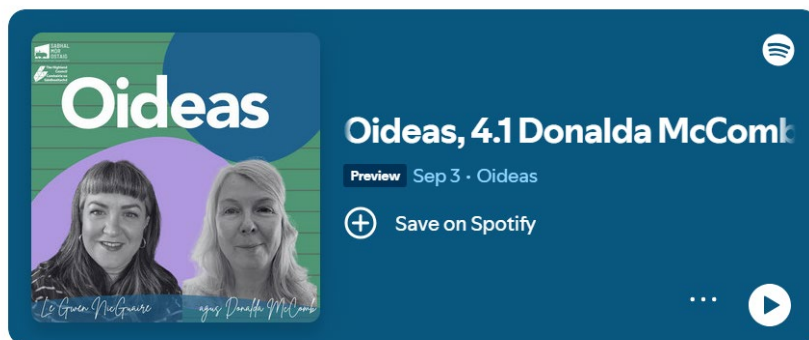
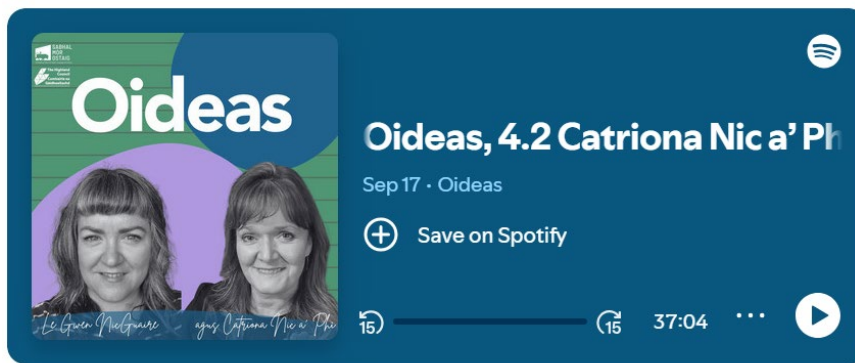
- 6.2.3 The programme aims to bring together local and national partners—including Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Education Scotland, and HM Inspectors of Education—to align messaging and share expertise. Key themes will include;

- Vision and Strategic Direction: Exploring Gaelic's wider societal and economic impact and celebrating 40 years of Gaelic Medium Education.
- Curriculum, Quality, and Pedagogy: Focusing on embedding Gaelic meaningfully in curriculum design, literacy, differentiation, and support for ASN.
- Resources, Innovation, and the Future: Highlighting national resources, media, and emerging technologies such as AI to support Gaelic education.

The event also considers how education can contribute to the economic sustainability of Gaelic, supporting growth in sectors such as culture, media, and business.

- 6.2.4 The event aims to provide a valuable opportunity to bring together key partners in Gaelic education, including Sabhal Mòr Ostaig (SMO), Education Scotland, and HM Inspectors of Education (HMIe). Their involvement strengthens collaborative approaches in Highland and beyond to supporting and developing Gaelic Medium Education. The workshop also marks a significant milestone, 40 years since the establishment of GME, offering a moment for teachers to reflect on progress and set future priorities.
- 6.2.5 To support next steps from the Gaelic Conference which focused on economic benefits of Gaelic, a key focus of the inservice planning and delivery aims to explore how education can contribute to the economic sustainability of Gaelic. This will include how Gaelic and education supports sectors such as media, culture and business, reinforcing the role of Gaelic within the economy in line with the Council's Gaelic Language Plan outcomes.
- 6.3 Oideas Series 4
- 6.3.1 *Oideas* is a podcast series developed by Sabhal Mòr Ostaig (SMO), supported by the Gaelic team and hosted by Gwen MacQuarrie, Head of Teacher Education SMO, that explores the landscape of Gaelic Medium Education through in-depth conversations with experienced educators. The podcast aims to support professional development, provoke new thinking, and foster shared learning among teachers working in Gaelic education. Each episode features reflective interviews considering the shared challenges, successes, and evolving practices within GME. The series is designed as a resource for both current and future Gaelic educators, offering insights into pedagogy, curriculum development, and the broader role of Gaelic in education.
- 6.3.2 The current series includes interviews with teachers who bring a wealth of experience, having witnessed the evolution of Gaelic education over decades. Their reflections offer valuable perspectives on practice, key messages for the future, and the enduring importance of Gaelic in shaping educational and cultural identity.
- 6.3.3 The *Oideas* podcast series complements the 40-year milestone by capturing reflective conversations with current and former Highland Council Gaelic Medium teachers. Interviews also include a conversation with Dr Donalda McComb. Dr McComb is the former Head Teacher of Scotland's first Gaelic 3-18 stand alone school in Scotland, established in 2006. <https://www.smo.uhi.ac.uk/oideas/?lang=en>





Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People

Date: 8/10/25

Author: Lena Walker, Education Support Officer