

Agenda Item	4
Report No	G/1/26

The Highland Council

Committee: Gaelic

Date: 25 February 2026

Report Title: Blas 2025 Events and Economic, Linguistical and Cultural Impact

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - People

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides a detailed analysis of the economic, Gaelic and cultural benefits delivered by the Blas Festival 2025 which is managed by Fèisean nan Gàidheal (FnanG). It highlights its robust contribution to Highland communities through financial impact, language promotion, cultural engagement, and stakeholder satisfaction.
- 1.2 Mr Calum Alex Macmillan, Chief Executive – Fèisean nan Gàidheal will give a detailed presentation on Blas Festival which took place between September 5–13 in communities across the Highland area and will provide information on forward planning for the festival. The Gaelic Development Officer is a member of the Blas Festival Programming Group.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:-
 - i. agree the continuation of annual funding for the BLAS festival, noting that all future allocations remain subject to the Council's annual budget review and external funding constraints;
 - ii. note that the festival's ability to secure external funding is dependent on The Highland Council providing ongoing annual support. Any reduction or withdrawal of this funding would place the wider funding package at risk;
 - iii. agree to support work on community ownership of Blas with the local promoters and revenue sharing to boost local engagement;
 - iv. agree to encourage that FnanG undertake research with their network of promoters to ensure that the promoters have a voice in the programming;
 - v. agree to continue to enhance the metrics for economic impact and Gaelic-language indicators in line with the outcomes of the Gaelic Language Plan;
 - vi. agree to continue to strengthen the links between The Highland Council and the Blas Festival organisers for 2026 event;
 - vii. note the work undertaken by FnanG, and An Comunn Gàidhealach with support from Highland Council and Bòrd na Gàidhlig regarding Mòd Academy which

- took place in Schools across the Lochaber Area in the lead up to the Lochaber Mòd (**Appendix 1**); and
- viii. agree that the Mòd Academy initiative forms part of the Mòd Loch Abar 2025 legacy project.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource

The Highland Council has funded the Blas Festival since its inception. This has enabled FnannG to attract additional funding from other organisations including Creative Scotland, Bòrd na Gàidhlig and other key agencies and organisations.

3.2 Legal

There are no legal implications arising in this report.

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 H&S implications arising from this report.

3.5 Gaelic

The Blas Festival has very positive implications in relation to Gaelic as it delivers a strong economic boost in areas where events take place, advanced Gaelic usage, youth engagement, cultural collaboration, intergenerational language transmission, new innovative commissions and community engagement. The continued support from Highland Council will secure these benefits and implications and strengthen Gaelic credibility, visibility and Highland Council's Gaelic cultural economic resilience. The Blas Festival also aligns with the priorities in the Gaelic Language Plan as per the following:

- Strategic Priority 1.1 - Increase support for all Gaelic users and learners, in their communities, and in the networks in which they operate.
- Strategic Priority 2.1 - Gaelic Media and Arts output – create opportunities for expression, skills, access, participation and creativity.
- Strategic Priority 3.1 - Use Gaelic in businesses and social enterprises, and as an economic asset in Scotland.

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 a monitoring update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5. Economic Impact

5.1 Total Economic Contribution:

Blas Festival has delivered at least £9 million in cumulative economic benefit to the Highland area since its inception.

5.2 Since Blas was launched in 2005, the outputs from Blas include:

- Employment of 5,564 musicians and singers
- Promotion of over 1,380 events throughout the Highlands
- Physical audiences of over 135,000
- A growing online audience since the establishment of FeisTV
- The provision of a mechanism for Highland Council to be involved in the Scottish Government's themed years.

5.2.1 All concerts, cèilidhs and events which took place in numerous venues, attracted audiences from local communities across the Highlands, and visitors from out-with the Highlands including several international visitors.

Programme Highlights included:

- The much-celebrated Anglo-Irish group, Flook performed at the festival for the first time.
- A new band, Prasgan, featuring a host of the finest Highland musicians made their debut performance at Blas.
- Two 'Caolas 50' events in Lochaber celebrated 50 years of the MV Maid of Glencoul on the Corran crossing (Ardgour) and 50 years of the Ballachulish bridge (Ballachulish).
- Five community ceilidhs took place during the festival featuring Robert Nairn, Andrew MacDonald, Iain MacMaster, Emma MacLeod, Darren Maclean, Mary Ann Kennedy, Calum MacColl and Norrie MacIver.
- Julie Fowles and Duncan Chisholm's performance commemorating the loss of the Iolaire was performed in Kyle and Ullapool to capacity audiences.
- Younger Fèis participants had the opportunity to perform alongside professional at many of our concerts and ceilidhs.
- A special concert was held in Bettyhill to celebrate 25 years of Fèis air an Oir and featured part participants and tutors as well as members of Trail West.
- The festival celebrated the 90th birthday of Catriona Garbutt, the renowned Gaelic singer, piper and tradition bearer from Benbecula. The event was supported by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.
- Partnerships with High Life Highland Library services and Highland Good Food Partnership extended the fringe offering.
- Additional partnerships with Seall, The Ceilidh Place, Croy Live, Light up Portree and The Raasay | The Restitution extended the programme offering.
- The festival finale was a very fitting celebration of traditional music and Gaelic song. The evening opened with Aon Ghuth, the first ever inclusive Gaelic choir and Fèis na h-Òige participants. This was followed by a performance of Mike Vass' Blas 2020 commission 'Air Falbh ann am Bata', which was performed by older Fèis participants. The second half of the evening was a celebration of Gaelic song with performances by Arthur Cormack, Jenna Cumming, Ruairidh Gray, Alice Macmillan, Ruairidh Cormack and Iain Cormack with a house band led by musical director, Ingrid Henderson and a string quartet led by Helena Rose.

- 5.3 Event Infrastructure and Local Procurement:
Blas supports a wide-ranging supply chain ranging from artists' accommodation, travel, sound, lighting, and event marketing supports local businesses. The Community partners receive 30% of ticket income plus fundraising opportunities through raffles and community social engagement
- 5.4 Economic Leverage through Partnerships:
Highland Council funding enabled additional support from Creative Scotland, Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council)

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People

Date: 22 January 2026

Author: Morag Anna MacLeod Mitchell, Gaelic Development Officer

Background Papers:

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Mod Academy

Graphs illustrating economic data:

Figure 1:
Bar chart showing cumulative economic contribution, events, performers, and community share.

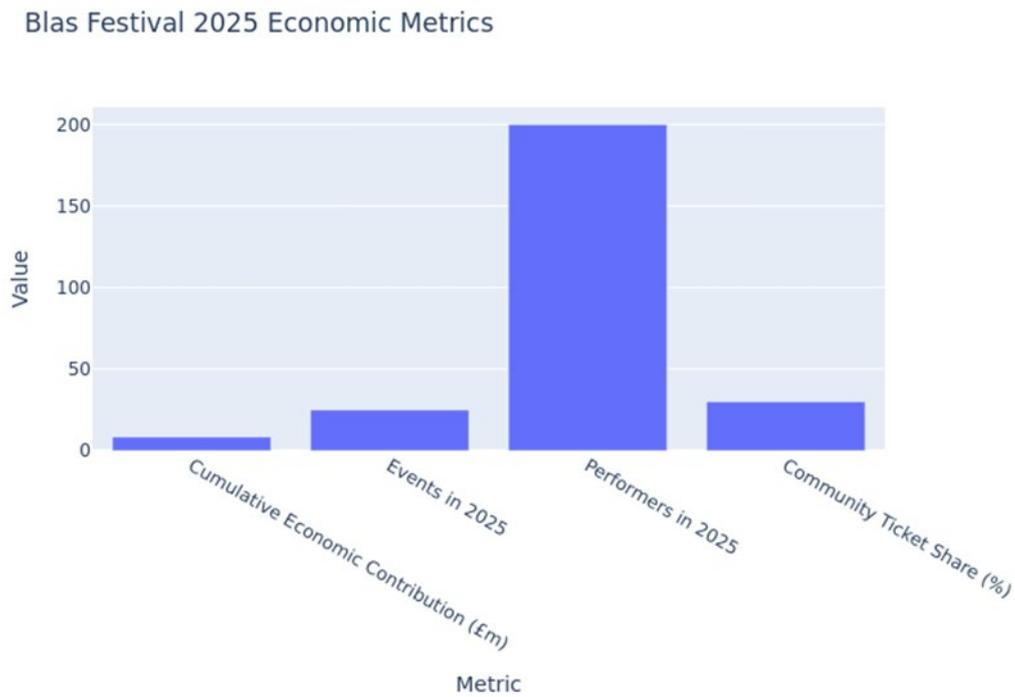
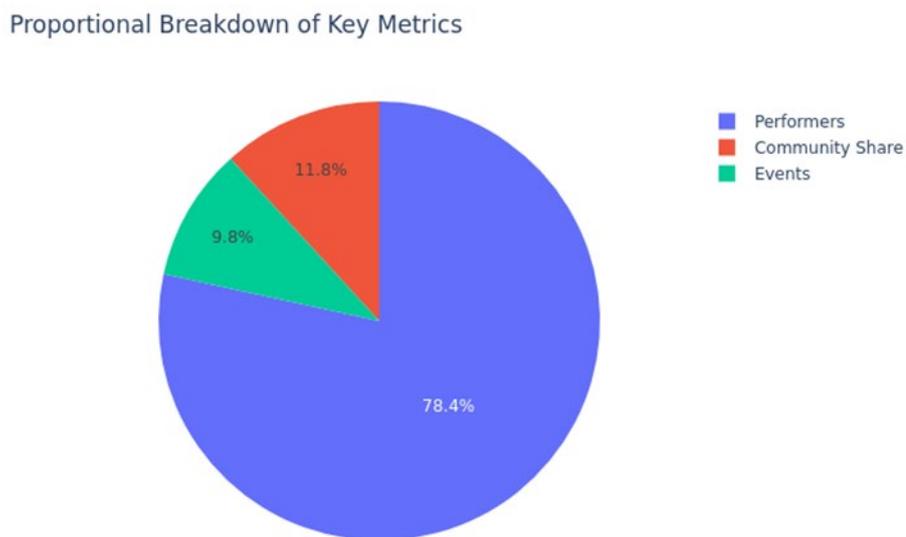
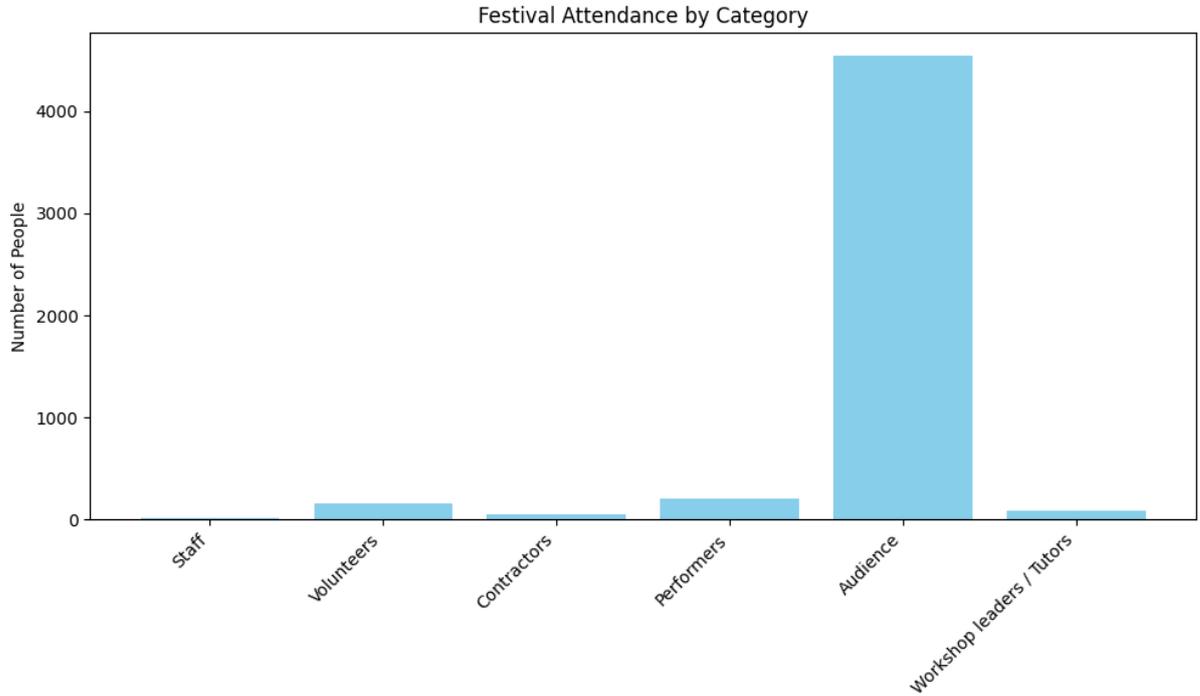


Figure 2:
Pie chart showing proportional breakdown of events, performers, and community share.



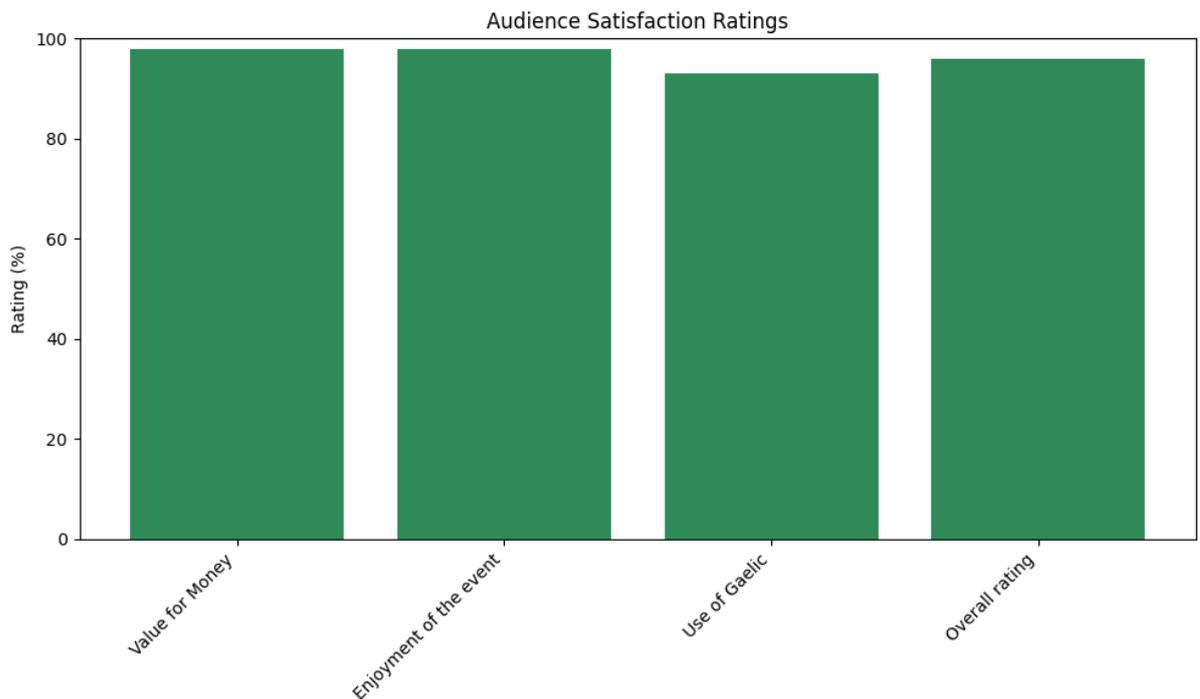
Festival Attendance by Category

Fig 3: This bar chart visualises the breakdown of everyone involved in the festival—from staff and volunteers to performers, tutors, and the audience. The attendance is the largest group.



Audience Ratings

Fig 4: This chart highlights the exceptionally strong positive response across all measured areas, with Value for Money and Enjoyment both reaching 98%.



Mod Academy

The Mod Academy was initiated by the Gaelic Team in conjunction with ACG was delivered for An Comunn Gàidhealach and Highland Council by Fèisean nan Gàidheal's formal education service, Fèisgoil, with funding from Bòrd na Gàidhlig and The Highland Council (MPG) also An Comunn Gàidhealach.

Between March and October 2025, 20 schools in the Lochaber area took part in the Mòd Academy and the initiative was lead and taught by a team of 6 Fèisgoil tutors. During the first block, whole class sessions were delivered so that all children in the schools involved had the opportunity to learn some Gaelic songs and as the Mòd preparations for the Mòd developed, tutors focussed on the pupils wishing to compete. There were 473 sessions delivered with a total of 464 children participating with more than 200 taking part in the Mòd either as soloists or as part of a group.

The schools involved are as follows, with those in bold including pupils entered to compete in October and those in Italics* competing online:

Acharacle

Arnamurchan High

Ballachulish

Banavie

Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar

Duror

Eigg

Invergarry

Kinlochleven High

Kinlochleven Primary

Lochaber High

Lochaline

Lundavra

Mallaig High

Mallaig Primary

Muck

Rum

Spean Bridge

St Bride's

Strontian

Additional points of interest:

- Tutors reported good engagement from school staff and pupils from across the Lochaber area.
- The Highland Council and Fèisean nan Gàidheal wish to highlight the support offered by Iain Robertson on behalf of the Meur Loch Abar and Chair of the Local Committee.
- Schools have involved themselves in the Mòd for the first time in many years, particularly those in the Ballachulish area.
- Lochaber High School had 9 pupils entering as soloists but as a result of the work of Mod Academy alongside the Gaelic department, they have also

managed to attract 17 high school students to form a choir for the Celtic Praise event and are hopeful this will lead to further choral development in the future.

- Some of the schools not competing nevertheless showed keen interest in learning the songs during the first block of delivery. These schools are all learning Gaelic as an additional language and were very grateful for the support.

Feedback from schools after completion of the project:

- 91% of respondents gave the sessions 5/5 for enjoyment and 82% gave 5/5 for confidence building, with the remaining respondents still scoring the sessions at 4/5. Content and tutor delivery returned exceptionally high levels of satisfaction; all respondents would like further support of this kind and cited positive health and well-being as well as positive Gaelic engagement through the initiative.

Impact:

- Learning Gaelic language as well as development of personal skills and attributes. Pupils very much enjoyed the sessions which prepared them for the Mod.
- The purpose of the sessions was to prepare pupils for the National Mod in a relatively short period of time. This was achieved in no small part due to the effort, commitment, perseverance and determination of the Mod Academy tutors this was evident impressive array of Mòd results.
- The sessions were great and it would be fantastic to have more opportunities for children to develop their skills in music and Gaelic, particularly in the younger years. For example, opportunities to support schools in creating their own Gaelic choir, or children to experience (and where able join in with) a session. The children in my class are keen to learn some traditional instruments e.g. clarsach, bagpipes. However, I know parents find it difficult to attend lessons in Fort William. Could lessons be taught during school time at school? Similar to how strings, brass and woodwind are taught. Are there any further opportunities for teachers to develop their own Gaelic speaking ability?
- All Small Isles Pupils were able to sing two Gaelic songs together in person during our Small Isles Week on the Isle of Rum. This is likely the first time an event like this has happened. This has raised the profile of Gaelic in our schools and in our isles.
- The tutor was able to engage meaningfully with pupils and encourage them to take part in solo and duet performances. The pupils do not often participate in the Mod and so this was a great start to see and hopefully a legacy for us at LHS.
- Pupils were more confident competing the local Mòd and keen to attend national.
- The Mòd Academy sessions have enhanced learning and engagement in Gaelic language and music.

Skills Development:

- Pupils developed Gaelic pronunciation, rhythm, musical memory, and confidence performing. Staff gained practical strategies for teaching Gaelic songs and integrating them into class routines.

Literacy:

- Improved Gaelic vocabulary, listening skills, and confidence in speaking, supporting literacy development.

Numeracy:

- Indirect benefits through rhythm counting and pattern work, reinforcing numeracy concepts.

Personal Skills:

- Pupils showed increased confidence, resilience, and teamwork, especially those initially hesitant to perform.

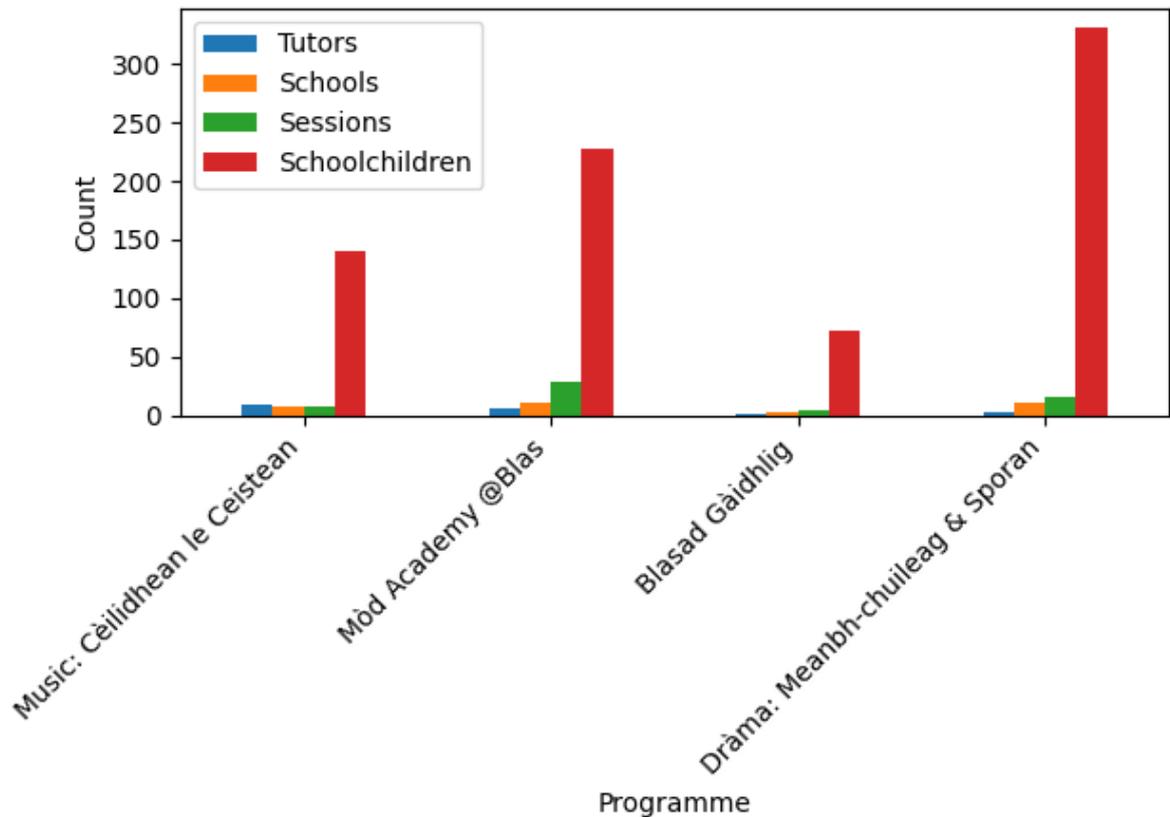
Staff Capacity:

- Staff feel more equipped to continue Gaelic activities independently and extend them to other classes and contexts. Overall, the sessions have left a very positive impact on pupils' skills and cultural awareness and built staff confidence to sustain the learning.

Mòd Academy Testimonials:

- We are extremely grateful for the opportunity to participate in the Mòd Academy sessions. They have had a clear and positive impact on our pupils' skills, confidence, and cultural understanding, and have provided staff with valuable tools to carry this learning forward. I strongly believe continued funding for these sessions is worthwhile, as they help preserve and promote Gaelic language and culture while delivering real educational benefits. Many thanks to the tutor and the team for their excellent work and support throughout.
- It was good for our pupils to join in with others and experience music in a group.
- All our pupils took part in learning two songs for local Mòd action song, we have had times in the past when pupils have been hesitant about doing so, but this year they were all very positive and were independently singing out with lesson time. We also had pupils take part in solo competitions at the local Mòd which helps build their confidence.
- Tha a' chlann a' togail uidh mhor sa Chanan is tha na puirt a' cordadh riutha gu mor. Fhuair clann nan Eilean Tarsainn cothrom seinn comhla ann an Gaidhlig airson na ciad uair - is iad a' gabhail oran mu na h-Eileanan aca fhein. Cha bhiodh an cothrom sin ann, as aonais an oideachadh a fhuair iad tro Acadamiadh a' Mhoid.
- The children are developing a great interest in the Gaelic language and they are really enjoying the tunes. The children from the Small Isles were given the opportunity to sing together in Gaelic for the first time - singing songs about their own Isles. That opportunity would not have been possible without the education they received through the Mod Academy.

Fo Education 6 - Fèisgoil @ Blas Overview



Blas Testimonials

“S e fèis uabhasach cudthromach airson Loch Abar a th'ann am Blas - bidh tachartasan beaga mar seo a' toirt dhuinn chothroman a thighinn còmhla agus a bhruidhinn ri chèile ann an suidheachadh soisealta. Agus bha e cho math a bhith ag èisteachd ri feadhainn de na cluicheadairean-ciùil as fheàrr san t-saoghal!

“Concert I attended was excellent; this is what traditional music is all about. Great venue as well, good local village hall. Thank you for booking Prasgan.”

“Had such a good time! Was visiting Isle of Skye as a first-time tourist to Scotland. My hotel choice and day tour choices were influenced by the Blas Concert.”

“It's great to see events in small communities.”

“Great events, spread the word on our culture and language, keep going.”

“Thank you for making these amazing events happen!”

“The Blas festival is one of the highlights of our year. There is always something on locally and the standard of musicianship is world class.”

‘Hosting a cèilidh with Blas brought new families to our hall and boosted café and accommodation trade all weekend.’