

**Research on Language Policy and Planning**

**GAELIC IN EDINBURGH:  
USAGE AND ATTITUDES**

**A Research Report**

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## Executive Summary

As an ever-increasing proportion of Gaelic speakers live outside the traditional Gàidhealtachd, the need to support and strengthen Gaelic communities in towns and cities such as Edinburgh is becoming steadily more important. Relatively little is known about Gaelic speakers in Edinburgh, especially with regard to where, when and how the language is used. Detailed information of this kind is urgently needed in order to guide effective language development policies.

This report is based on the results of a questionnaire completed by 105 people, principally fluent Gaelic speakers, who live or work in Edinburgh. Questions addressed respondents' linguistic abilities, use of Gaelic, and views concerning of the language. A copy of the questionnaire is given as an appendix to this report.

This research builds on existing census data. According to the 2001 census, approximately 6.5% of Scotland's Gaelic speakers live in Edinburgh. 6,031 people in Edinburgh have some skills in Gaelic (1.35% of the city's population), and of this group 3,085 can speak the language. Gaelic speakers are scattered throughout the city rather than concentrated in any particular area(s). Gaelic-speaking children are somewhat scarce and there is a bulge in the middle age groups, a reflection of the fact that that many people move to Edinburgh for educational or work reasons.

63% of survey respondents were fluent in Gaelic and a further 26% were moderately fluent. Of the fluent speakers, approximately 73% were 'native' speakers and 27% learners. Levels of Gaelic literacy in the fluent speaker group were very high. 82% of fluent native speakers acquired Gaelic while growing up in the Highlands & Islands, but only 22% of fluent learners acquired Gaelic in the Highlands & Islands. Only 11% of fluent native speakers and 39% of fluent learners acquired their Gaelic in Edinburgh. To a substantial extent, Edinburgh's Gaelic-speaking population can thus be said to consist of 'incomers' of one kind or another.

Some of the most important data produced by this research is that relating to Gaelic language use in the home and the family. Unfortunately, the results here give little reason for optimism: the rate of language transmission from generation to generation is very low, few people use Gaelic as their main home language, and hardly any families in the city use Gaelic consistently.

38% of respondents live in homes where everyone can speak Gaelic, but almost three-fifths of this group live on their own. Among fluent respondents with partners, almost 84% reported that their partners speak little or no Gaelic, and even when both partners spoke Gaelic fluently, 43% reported using more English than Gaelic with each other. More than 40% of fluent respondents stated that their children do not speak Gaelic. Respondents use English much more than Gaelic when speaking with their children, while the children themselves, even when Gaelic-speaking, tend to use English with each other.

63% of the fluent respondents do not have a strong preference for using Gaelic rather than English, but adapt according to different situations.

Very few people use Gaelic as their main language in daily life in Edinburgh. 37% of fluent speakers claimed to use Gaelic on a daily basis, but only 3% claimed to use more Gaelic than English every day, i.e. that Gaelic is their principal language.

Conversely, 17% of fluent speakers stated that they speak Gaelic only one day a week, or even less frequently. 76% of respondents indicated that they know at least 10 Gaelic speakers in Edinburgh, but only 27% of fluent speakers claimed to speak Gaelic to 10 or more people in a normal week. Only 7% of respondents stated that they hear strangers in Edinburgh speaking Gaelic to each other at least once a month, while 86% reported that this occurred only a few times a year, or still less frequently.

Gaelic is much more widely used in certain contexts and situations than others. 53% of fluent respondents indicated that they listen to more Gaelic radio than English, 24% that they use more Gaelic than English in their workplace, 21% when speaking on the telephone and 17% when in friends' or relatives' homes. Conversely, only 2% claimed to use Gaelic more than English when reading books, magazines or newspapers, and no one claimed to use Gaelic more than English in shops.

59% of respondents belonged to Gaelic organisations. Rates of membership were highest among fluent learners and lowest among fluent native speakers. The majority of respondents indicated that they attend Gaelic events in Edinburgh, but for most of them this is not a daily, weekly or even monthly occurrence. For example, 73% of respondents indicate that they attend traditional ceilidhs in the city, but for two-thirds of them this only happens once or twice a year.

With regard to Gaelic-medium education (GME), most respondents (78%) who chose GME for their children are not themselves fluent Gaelic speakers, while 86% of the fluent native speakers with children of school age did not have them enrolled in GME. This pattern presents a major challenge for the maintenance and development of Gaelic in Edinburgh.

Respondents were given a number of questions concerning people's views about Gaelic in Edinburgh, perceptions of Gaelic in general, and public policy relating to the language. Respondents were also given an opportunity to elaborate their views on these topics in more detail.

Respondents felt strongly that Gaelic should be promoted in Edinburgh: 72% stated that doing so was either 'important' or 'very important' and only 5% that it was 'not really very important' or 'not important at all'. Conversely, respondents felt that the great majority of Edinburgh residents are not supportive of promoting Gaelic in the city. Respondents also felt that the Scottish Executive and especially Edinburgh City Council are not supportive of Gaelic.

Respondents themselves had very positive views of Gaelic in general and felt that it should have national status. Opinions on perceptions of the language — for example, whether it is seen as old-fashioned — were more mixed.

The results here demonstrate the scale of the challenges involved in efforts to promote Gaelic in Edinburgh. Clearly, very few people in Edinburgh live their lives through Gaelic. While it is probably not realistic to expect that Edinburgh can become a bilingual city in any meaningful sense, efforts should be made to make 'living through Gaelic' possible for those who would wish this. The City of Edinburgh Council has committed itself to preparing a Gaelic Language Plan following the enactment of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act, and this plan will be critical for the development of such structures and opportunities.

## Introduction

The Gaelic community is undergoing constant change. One of the most significant trends is the increasingly scattered nature of the community: in 1881, 88% of Scotland's Gaelic speakers lived in the Highlands & Islands and only 12% in the Lowlands, while today, according to the 2001 census, almost half of Gaelic speakers (44.5%) live in the Lowlands (MacKinnon 2004). There are more people with Gaelic in Edinburgh than in Skye, for example, or in Uist and Barra combined.

In light of this transformation, the urban Gaelic communities —established in the 18th century — have become more important than ever. If Gaelic is to survive, it must be developed and strengthened in Lowland areas, especially in large cities and towns like Edinburgh, and not only in those island communities where it remains a community language. Indeed, new Gàidhealtachds need to be developed (McLeod forthcoming).

This is a serious challenge, for up to now the urban Gaelic communities have not in fact been stable or sustainable, although they were often full of cultural vitality. The process of language shift meant that Gaelic was generally lost within a generation or two; the grandchildren of Gaels who came to the cities were usually English monoglots, effectively lost to the Gaelic-speaking community. Today, the situation has become still more difficult in that urban Gaelic communities are more scattered than they once were: the days of dense urban Gaelic communities like Glasgow's Partick appear to be over. Yet the cities retain certain advantages with regard to Gaelic development, for in many ways it is easier to successfully organise Gaelic groups, events and centres in an urban environment than in a thinly populated rural area (cf. MacCaluim, forthcoming).

Up to now, relatively little information has been available with regard to the situation of the language in the cities in general and in Edinburgh in particular. Census data provides a certain foundation, as outlined below, but yields no specific information concerning Gaelic language use: who speaks Gaelic, where, how often and so on. Details of this kind are urgently needed if intelligent and effective language promotion policies are to be developed and implemented.

Indeed, there is an information deficit with regard to Gaelic language use more generally, although the Euromosaic project in the mid-1990s yielded a range of useful data (MacKinnon 1994; Euromosaic 1995).<sup>1</sup> It is hoped that this research may go some way towards filling this gap and will encourage further work in this area.

## Overview of the project

This report is based on the results of a questionnaire that was distributed between March and June 2003. Information was sought from people who live or work in the city of Edinburgh. 220 questionnaires were distributed and 105 returned (a response rate of 45%). The questionnaire was fairly long and quite detailed: 43 questions in all, with sub-questions attached to several of them. Specific information was sought concerning respondents' linguistic abilities, their use of Gaelic, and their views concerning the value and importance of the language. All respondents were given one copy of the questionnaire in Gaelic and one in English so that they would be able to choose their preferred language (even though not all respondents were able to read/write Gaelic). A copy of the questionnaire is appended to this report.

It was initially anticipated that the information gleaned from the questionnaire would be supplemented by a number of interviews, but it was eventually determined that the questionnaire had provided sufficient information as the form gave respondents substantial opportunities to express opinions and views, and a considerable number of respondents took up these opportunities. As such, this report encompasses both quantitative and qualitative data, especially in section 7 (Opinions concerning Gaelic).

Because the main aim of the research was to investigate language use rather than general language attitudes, the report places principal emphasis on responses from individuals who are at least semi-fluent in Gaelic. This aim was somewhat difficult to fulfill, however, as it was not easy to identify and target fluent speakers of the language (as opposed to those learning Gaelic, for example, or participating in the Gaelic arts). At the same time, it would have been impractical to undertake research among the general population of Edinburgh, given that more than 98% of the population have no knowledge of Gaelic at all.

Accordingly, the researcher sought help from a number of Gaelic organisations based in the city or having members in the city, such as Clì Gàidhlig, Cluicheadairean Gàidhlig Dhùn Èideann (a Gaelic drama group), Comann nam Pàrant (Edinburgh and Lothian), FÀS (Dùn Èideann), and Lothian Gaelic Choir, and from educational institutions such as the department of Celtic and Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, James Gillespie's High School, and Taigh na Gàidhlig. 'Word of mouth' was also helpful in the distribution of the questionnaires: a number of names and addresses were received informally, through the recommendations of others.

At the same time, there was a perceived risk that the research might only reach the 'hard core' and would fail to involve other Gaelic speakers having no involvement in Gaelic organisations or events and not taking part in Edinburgh's Gaelic 'scene'. In order to gain an accurate understanding of the situation of Gaelic in Edinburgh, it was felt that information should be sought from Gaelic speakers who do not actually use their Gaelic often and may not see it as having much relevance in the urban context — for example, individuals who left the Western Isles twenty or forty years ago and now have partners, children and friends with no Gaelic.

Accordingly, letters were published in the *Stornoway Gazette* and the *Oban Times*, explaining the nature of this research and inviting readers in Edinburgh to complete the questionnaire. A number of respondents did make contact following the publication of these letters, but the risk remains that the results of this research do not show the full range and diversity of the linguistic practices and views of Edinburgh's Gaelic speakers.

## **Data from the census**

According to the 2001 census, there were 6,031 people in Edinburgh who had some skills in Gaelic, some 1.35% of the city's population. Of this group 3,085 people, 0.69% of the total population, could speak Gaelic. In Scotland as a whole, the census recorded 93,282 people with some skills in Gaelic (58,750 of whom could speak the language); as such approximately 6.5% of Scotland's Gaelic speakers live in Edinburgh.

**Table 1**

<b>Gaelic in Edinburgh, 2001:</b>	
speaks/reads/writes Gaelic	1,756
speaks and reads (but cannot write) Gaelic	360
speaks (but cannot read or write) Gaelic	969
understands (but cannot speak, read or write Gaelic)	2,058
other combination of skills in Gaelic	888
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,031 (1.35%)</b>

Gaelic speakers were scattered throughout the city rather than concentrated in any particular area or areas. Among the various 'Census Area Statistic Sectors' in Edinburgh, the highest level was recorded in the EH3 9 sector (Tollcross), but even here the level of Gaelic speakers was no higher than 1.56%.

A distinctive feature of Edinburgh's Gaelic-speaking population is the high proportion born outwith Scotland: 21.5%. The national proportion is only 8.27%. Indeed, the figure for Edinburgh is the highest of any local authority area in Scotland, while the lowest was recorded in the Western Isles, where 2.78% of Gaelic speakers were born outwith Scotland. This precise question was not asked in the present research, but respondents were asked where they were living when they learned Gaelic (see Table 8 below). As such, if a person born in Canada began to learn Gaelic while living in the Western Isles, (s)he would give the Western Isles as the answer to this question; nevertheless, it is almost certainly the case that the overwhelming majority of those who learned Gaelic in the Western Isles were actually born there.

With regard to age, Gaelic-speaking children are somewhat scarce and there is a bulge in the middle age groups: only 11.2% of Gaelic speakers were under the age of 20 and 48% were between 20 and 44, compared to 21.6% and 41% in these age groups in Edinburgh's overall population. It is likely that this pattern reflects the number of people who moved to Edinburgh for educational or work purposes.

The Gaelic-speaking population had a high level of education: 46% had degrees or professional qualifications, compared to 33% of the city's population as a whole. 56% of Gaelic speakers were employed in the three highest social grades and 18% in the three lowest grades, as against 49% and 24% of the overall Edinburgh population.<sup>2</sup> 14.3% were students, as against 11% of the overall population.

## **Questionnaire results**

### **(1) The respondents – an overview**

As explained above, because this research focuses mainly on Gaelic language use, information was sought principally from those who are at least moderately fluent in the language. A number of responses were received from people without significant Gaelic language skills, however — principally parents of children receiving Gaelic-medium

education — and these replies were also useful. As such, most of the data in this report reflects the results obtained from those who indicated that they were fluent or moderately fluent Gaelic speakers.<sup>3</sup> The questionnaire results in respect of linguistic abilities are set out in the following section of this report.

Note that figures given in this report are generally rounded up or down to the nearest whole number so that in some cases totals exceed 100%.

In all, 53 of the respondents were female and 52 male; among those respondents claiming fluency in Gaelic, the numbers were 33 and 33. The situation with regard to age was less balanced, however, as there were unfortunately few responses from young people: only 17.5% of responses came from the 16-34 age group, although the corresponding sector of the city's over-16 population amounts to more than a third.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the proportion of respondents over the age of 65 was closer to the city average (17.8%); 62% of respondents were between 35 and 64.

**Table 2**

<b>Age of respondents</b>	<b>%</b>
16-18	4
18-24	2
25-34	12
35-44	27
45-54	18
55-64	17
65+	19

In general, the respondents had a high level of education: 92% had a degree (or degrees) or other qualification from a university or college. Although these figures are unquestionably high, these results reflect the facts that many Gaels come to the city in connection with university courses or professional employment, and that most individuals who have learned Gaelic to fluency tend to be highly educated.

**Table 3**

<b>What is the highest level of education you attained?</b>	<b>%</b>
post-graduate degree	24
undergraduate degree	36
teaching qualification	8
college diploma/certificate	11
Higher Grade/A Level	13
Standard Grade/O Level	5
other	4

In general, the respondents are long-time Edinburgh residents: 66% stated that they had been living in Edinburgh all their lives or more than 20 years, and only 11% had been in the city for less than five years. One notable finding is that the same proportion of native speakers have lived in Edinburgh all their lives (11%) or more than 20 years (55%), even though the great majority of the latter group came from the Highlands and Islands originally (see Table 8 below).

Respondents were scattered throughout the city: there is evidently no ‘Gaelic quarter’ in Edinburgh, and nowhere in the city do Gaelic speakers reach critical mass. This must surely be an impediment to the development of the language.

Most respondents (58%) were involved in paid employment, but a fairly substantial proportion (21%) were retired. Given that 19% of the respondents indicated that they were over 65, this finding is unsurprising. The majority of respondents in employment held professional or administrative/clerical posts.

**Table 4**

<b>Are you currently in paid employment?</b>	<b>%</b>
yes, full-time	42
yes, part-time	16
no, but I am looking for work	4
no	9
retired	21
currently in full-time education	8

## **(2) Respondents’ linguistic abilities**

63% of respondents indicated that they were fluent Gaelic speakers and a further 26% indicated that they were moderately fluent speakers. Only 4% of respondents claimed they could understand Gaelic but not speak it – a significant divergence from the distribution of skills revealed by the 2001 census, which showed 34% of those having Gaelic in this category. 3% of respondents stated that they were more fluent in Gaelic than English.

**Table 5**

<b>How fluent are you in Gaelic?</b>	<i>All respondents</i>	<i>Fluent native speakers</i>	<i>Fluent learners</i>
more fluent in Gaelic than in English	3	6	0
equally fluent in Gaelic and English	30	58	17
fluent, but my English is better	30	35	83
only moderately fluent	26	-	-
I understand Gaelic but I can’t speak it	4	-	-
just a few words	8	-	-

As might be expected, native speakers claimed greater fluency than the learners who assessed themselves as fluent speakers: 65% of the fluent native speakers stated that they were as fluent in Gaelic in English, but 83% of the fluent learner group felt that their English was better than their Gaelic.<sup>5</sup>

The respondents claimed high levels of reading and writing ability in Gaelic. Levels were especially high within the fluent learner group, but the levels recorded among the fluent native speaker group were also well above the national average of 53%. However, there is a significant divergence between the questionnaire respondents and the wider Edinburgh Gaelic community, as the 2001 census showed that only 57% of the city's Gaelic speakers can read and write Gaelic.

**Table 6**

<b>Can you read Gaelic? (%)</b>	<i>All respondents</i>	<i>Fluent speakers</i>	<i>Fluent learners</i>
yes	74 / 63	94 / 85	100 / 100
with difficulty	20 / 26	6 / 14	0 / 0
no	6 / 11	0 / 2	0 / 0

The great majority of respondents put these skills to use in completing the questionnaire: of those respondents who claimed to be able to write Gaelic, 96% of them completed the Gaelic version of the questionnaire in preference to the English one.<sup>6</sup>

As set out in Table 7, respondents acquired Gaelic in a variety of different ways:<sup>7</sup> some in the home when they were growing up, some in school or university, some through residence in a Gaelic-speaking area. For purposes of this study, all respondents who identified 'at home when I was growing up' as the place (or one of the places) where they learned Gaelic are classified as 'native speakers', irrespective of whether these individuals although this includes some individuals who do not now consider themselves fully fluent in Gaelic. In all, 60 respondents (57% of the total) listed 'at home when I was growing up' as the place or one of the places where they had acquired Gaelic; the great majority of these (48) reported themselves as fluent speakers, but 8 claimed only moderate fluency in Gaelic, 2 claimed to understand Gaelic but not speak it, and 2 claimed to have just a few words of the language. Conversely, 18 respondents indicated that they did not learn Gaelic at home when growing up, but that they are now fluent in the language. Among fluent respondents, then, 'native' speakers outnumber 'learners' by some 3:1.

**Table 7**

<b>How did you learn Gaelic? (fluent speakers only)</b>	<b>%</b>
at home when I was growing up	45
at school	14
through a course/courses at university, college or other educational institution	20
by living in a Gaelic-speaking area	17
other	5

The great majority (82%) of fluent native speakers acquired Gaelic while growing up in the Highlands & Islands, but only 22% of the fluent learners acquired their Gaelic in the Highlands & Islands. Only 11% of fluent native speakers and 39% of fluent learners acquired their Gaelic in Edinburgh. To a substantial extent, Edinburgh's Gaelic-speaking population can thus be said to consist of 'incomers' of one kind or another.

**Table 8**

Where were you living when you learned Gaelic? <sup>8</sup> (%)	Fluent speakers	Fluent native speakers	Fluent learners
Edinburgh	18	11	39
Hebrides	59	76	14
Lewis	28	38	1
Skye	10	10	9
Harris	8	11	
Benbecula	5	6	
Scalpay	2	3	
Eriskay	2	2	
Lismore	2	2	
Berneray (Harris)	0.8	1	
Colonsay	0.8		3
Barra	0.3		1
Raasay	0.3	0.3	
South Uist	0.3	0.3	
mainland Highlands	6	6	8
elsewhere in Scotland	14	8	31
other	4	2	8
England	2	2	3
Canada	2		6

### (3) Use of Gaelic in the family

Some of the most important data produced by this research is that relating to language use in the home and the family. This is the heart of the *intergenerational transmission* process; as the leading sociolinguist Joshua Fishman explains, no minority language can be successfully revitalised, and no language shift reversed, without success on this front (Fishman 1991).

Unfortunately, the research results here concerning language use in Edinburgh gives little reason for optimism in this connection: the rate of intergenerational transmission is very low, few people use Gaelic as their main home language, and there seem to be hardly any families in the city in which Gaelic is used consistently — i.e. where both parents speak to each other, when the parents speak to the children, and when the children speak to each other.

38% of all respondents and 41% of the fluent respondents live in homes in which all residents speak Gaelic, but in most cases (22% / 23%) these were individuals living on their own.

**Table 9**

<b>Can everyone in your household speak Gaelic? (%)</b>	<i>All respondents</i>	<i>Fluent speakers</i>
yes	16	18
yes (but I live by myself)	22	23
no	62	59

There were very few couples in which both partners speak Gaelic: among fluent speakers, there were only seven couples in which both partners were fluent speakers, a mere 16% of the total. Language ability was obviously not a decisive factor determining respondents' choice of partner; while this finding is not surprising, its significance for the sustenance of Gaelic in the city is hard to overstate.

**Table 10**

<b>If you have a partner, does (s)he speak Gaelic?</b>	<i>All respondents</i>	<i>Fluent native speakers</i>	<i>Fluent learners</i>
yes	12 (17%)	5 (14%)	2 (20%)
a little	15 (21%)	9 (26%)	3 (30%)
no	45 (63%)	21 (60%)	5 (50%)

Among fluent speakers with a Gaelic-speaking partner, levels of Gaelic use are low. Of all the respondents only one couple stated that they always use Gaelic with each other. There is a striking difference between couples in which both partners are fluent and those in which one is only moderately fluent: 57% of those in the former category stated that they always speak Gaelic to each other, or speak Gaelic and English equally, while all those in the latter category stated that they always use English with each other.

**Table 11**

<b>If your partner speaks Gaelic, what languages do you usually speak to each other?</b>	<i>Fluent speakers with fluent Gaelic-speaking partners</i>	<i>Fluent speakers with partners with 'a little' Gaelic</i>
always Gaelic	1 (14%)	0
more Gaelic than English	0	0
equal amounts of Gaelic and English	3 (43%)	0
more English than Gaelic	3 (43%)	0
always English	0	12 (100%)

On the other hand, it is interesting (if perhaps somewhat difficult to explain) that the level of Gaelic use is slightly higher among respondents who are themselves semi-fluent speakers but who have a fluent partner: there were four such respondents, two with a fluent partner and two with a partner with 'some' Gaelic, but all these respondents claimed that they use more English than Gaelic when speaking to each other, which implies that they do use Gaelic at least some of the time.

Levels of intergenerational transmission are low: of those respondents fluent in Gaelic, more than 40% stated that their children do not speak Gaelic. This finding is both important and discouraging, but it does accord with other evidence on this point. For example, Professor Kenneth MacKinnon's analysis of the 1991 census showed that in Lowland Scotland, when one of two parents spoke Gaelic, only 6.8% of children spoke Gaelic, and even when both parents were Gaelic speakers, only 60% of children had Gaelic (MacKinnon 1997: 107).

Transmission levels are higher among the fluent learner group than native speakers: 50% of the fluent learners claimed that their children speak Gaelic, compared to only 14% of native speakers. (The number of fluent learners at issue is very small, however: 50% represents 4 out of 8 respondents with children). Indeed, the rate among semi-fluent speakers and those respondents with only very limited Gaelic was higher (at 22%) than among fluent native speakers; however, most of the children of such respondents received or are receiving Gaelic-medium education, and (to a substantial extent at any rate) acquired their Gaelic in school.<sup>9</sup>

**Table 12**

<b>If you have a child (or children), do they speak Gaelic?</b>	<i>All respondents</i>	<i>Fluent native speakers</i>	<i>Fluent learners</i>
yes	11 (22%)	4 (14%)	4 (50%)
yes, a little	15 (30%)	11 (39%)	0
some of them do	6 (12%)	4 (14%)	0
no	18 (36%)	9 (32%)	4 (50%)

Language transmission from parent to child obviously requires that they use the language with each other. Given that rates of transmission are low, it is unsurprising that most of the parents and children do not appear to use Gaelic with each other. Even when both parents are fluent speakers and the children also have Gaelic, only 25% use Gaelic all the time while the remainder use English at least as often or indeed more often than Gaelic.

**Table 13**

<b>If you have a child (or children), which languages do you usually speak to them?<sup>10</sup></b>	<i>All respondents</i>	<i>Fluent native speakers</i>	<i>Fluent learners</i>	<i>Respondents with Gaelic-speaking child(ren)</i>	<i>Native speakers with Gaelic-speaking child(ren)</i>
always Gaelic	2 (3%)	2 (7%)	0	2 (13%)	2 (25%)
more Gaelic than English	0	0	0	0	0
equal amounts of Gaelic and English	6 (10%)	2 (7%)	3 (43%)	3 (20%)	3 (38%)
more English than Gaelic	15 (26%)	6 (21%)	1 (14%)	9 (60%)	3 (38%)
always English	32 (55%)	18 (62%)	3 (43%)	1 (7%)	0
eile	3 (5%)	1 (3%)	1 (14%)	0	0

An additional question was asked of those respondents with more than one child, all of whom speak Gaelic: 'which languages do they usually speak to each other?' Of 13 respondents,<sup>11</sup> 1 (8%) stated that the children always speak Gaelic to each other, 7 (54%) that they speak more English than Gaelic, and 5 (38%) that they always use English. This finding demonstrates the weakness of Gaelic in Edinburgh, but it does correspond to the results of the Scotland-wide research conducted for the Euromosaic report in 1994 (Euromosaic 1995: Table 6).

#### **(4) Language choice and language loyalty**

Further questions addressed the issue of general language loyalty. It is clear that levels of language loyalty are not especially high: most fluent speakers (63%) indicated that they do not have any definite preference for Gaelic over English. 8% of fluent speakers stated that they generally prefer to use English rather than Gaelic; but all of these claimed to be more fluent in English than in Gaelic.

**Table 14**

<b>If you have a choice, do you prefer to speak Gaelic or English? (%)</b>	<i>Fluent speakers only</i>
Gaelic	29
English	8
depends on the situation	58
not bothered	5
don't know / not sure	0

Among those respondents who stated that they generally prefer to speak Gaelic, a number of reasons for doing so were offered, and there were clear differences between native speakers and learners in this connection. 41% of native speakers who indicated this preference explained that Gaelic was their mother tongue or that their Gaelic is better or more fluent; predictably perhaps, only 7% of the learners who claimed to prefer to speak Gaelic gave explanations of this kind.

Respondents were given the opportunity to give more than one reason for their preference: among the other reasons offered, some were aesthetic in nature and others political. One respondent, for example, stated that he felt the English language is a 'bully', which he found objectionable. A number of respondents simply stated that they found speaking Gaelic more pleasurable than speaking English.

**Table 15**

<b>If you prefer to speak Gaelic, why? (%)</b>	<i>Fluent native speakers</i>	<i>Fluent learners</i>
Gaelic is my mother tongue	38	7
I want to keep Gaelic alive	31	33
it's easier to speak Gaelic	10	0
my family / friends / co-workers speak Gaelic	10	20
my Gaelic is better / more fluent	3	0
don't know / not sure	0	7
other reason(s)	7	33

Among the small group of fluent speakers who indicated that they preferred to speak English, 37.5% stated that this was because English is their mother tongue, 37.5% because family, friends and/or co-workers speak English, 12.5% because their English is better or more fluent, and 12.5% because they find speaking English easier. None of the respondents chose the 'political' option given on the questionnaire, i.e. 'I don't see much point in speaking Gaelic'. (This result is encouraging, but it may be that different results might have been obtained from 'peripheral' Gaelic speakers not reached by this research).

## **(5) Use of Gaelic in public and social situations**

A number of questions sought information about the use of Gaelic in different situations: how often people speak Gaelic and the breadth of its range of uses.

It is evident that very few people use Gaelic as their main language in daily life in Edinburgh. 37% of fluent speakers claimed to use Gaelic every day, but only 3% claimed to use more Gaelic than English on a daily basis, i.e. that Gaelic is their principal language. Conversely, 17% of fluent speakers stated that they speak Gaelic only one day a week, or even less frequently.

**Table 16**

<b>In a typical week, how often do you speak Gaelic? (%)</b>	<i>Fluent speakers</i>	<i>Semi-fluent speakers</i>
more Gaelic than English every day	3	0
every day	34	15
4-6 days a week	23	8
2-3 days a week	18	19
1 day a week	9	27
less than 1 day a week on average	8	27
don't know / not sure	5	4

Gaelic-related social networks in the city do not appear to be tight-knit. Although 76% of respondents indicated that they know at least 10 Gaelic speakers who live in Edinburgh, only 27% of fluent speakers claimed to speak Gaelic to 10 or more people in a normal week, while 58% stated that they speak Gaelic to fewer than 5 people.

**Table 17**

<b>How many Gaelic speakers do you know who live in Edinburgh? (%)</b>	<i>All respondents</i>	<i>Fluent native speakers</i>	<i>Fluent learners</i>
more than 50	13	21	0
20-50	43	38	67
10-19	20	17	17
5-9	12	13	6
fewer than 5	9	8	6
don't know / not sure	4	4	6

**Table 18**

<b>In a typical week, how many different people do you speak Gaelic to in Edinburgh? (%)</b>	<i>Fluent native speakers</i>	<i>Fluent learners</i>
more than 50	2	0
20-50	8	0
10-19	17	15
5-9	14	19
fewer than 5	58	63
don't know / not sure	3	5

There was a noticeable difference between the usage patterns of fluent native speakers and those of fluent learners. As might be expected, native speakers were considerably more likely to use the language with other native speakers rather than with learners. Despite this, there seemed to be no fundamental divide between the two speaker groups. Some learners felt that native speakers were not supportive of

learners, but one native speaker commented that he actually goes out of his way to use Gaelic with learners when the chance arises.

**Table 19**

<b>What kind of people do you speak Gaelic to in Edinburgh? (%)</b>	<i>Fluent native speakers</i>	<i>Fluent learners</i>
native speakers only	34	6
both native speakers and learners	40	33
more learners than native speakers	17	61
learners only	0	0
don't know / not sure	9	0

To a very considerable extent, Gaelic appears to be a private, almost hidden language in Edinburgh. Only 7% of respondents stated that they hear strangers<sup>12</sup> in Edinburgh speaking Gaelic to each other at least once a month, while 86% reported that this occurred only a few times a year, or even less frequently.

**Table 20**

<b>How often do you hear strangers speaking Gaelic in Edinburgh?</b>	<b>%</b>
every day	0
at least once a week	3
at least once a month	4
just a few times a year	42
less frequently	44
don't know / not sure	7

Several questions addressed the extent to which Gaelic is used for particular purposes or in particular contexts. As expected, Gaelic was much more used for some purposes than in others. For example, no respondent claimed to use Gaelic more than English while shopping in Edinburgh — indeed, it might be considered surprising that 36% of respondents claimed to do so at least occasionally. Of the specific purposes highlighted in the questionnaire, some relate to activities that everyone does, to some extent at least, and others to activities that not all respondents would do (in any language). Thus, while everyone probably goes to shops or restaurants, not everyone uses the Internet or is engaged in paid employment. Thus, for example, 17% of fluent speakers claimed to use Gaelic every day when they use the Internet, but at the same time, a significant proportion of respondents would not use the Internet at all, so that the proportion of daily Gaelic users among those respondents who do in fact use the Internet would be rather higher than 17%.

<b>Where do you use Gaelic in Edinburgh, and how do you use it?</b> <i>(fluent speakers only)</i>	Every day (%)	5-6 days a week (%)	3-4 days a week (%)	1-2 days a week (%)	less frequently (%)	don't know/ not sure (%)	<b>total (%)</b>
listening to the radio	33	15	11	21	12	4	94
watching television	14	2	8	44	26	0	94
reading or writing letters	5	2	5	20	59	5	94
reading books, magazines or newspapers	24	8	8	27	21	4	92
on the telephone	12	9	14	29	21	3	88
in conversations in the street	3	0	3	18	53	8	85
in friends' or relatives' homes	2	0	5	18	53	3	80
in pubs, restaurants or cafés	3	0	3	18	44	6	74
when using the Internet (including e-mail)	17	8	6	12	21	4	67
in the workplace	20	N/A	8	9	20	2	58
in shops	0	0	0	3	33	9	45
at school / college / university	8	N/A	11	2	14	6	39

A more important question, perhaps, is the relative frequency of active Gaelic usage in these contexts. In most cases, even when respondents indicated that they did use Gaelic for particular purposes, they actually used English more often. On the other hand, it is interesting and perhaps encouraging that a not inconsiderable proportion of fluent speakers use Gaelic more than English in certain 'core' social situations, when visiting friends' and relatives' homes (17%) or talking on the telephone (21%). This result underscores the critical importance of 'Gaelic social networks' in the city.

**Table 22**

<b>Do you use more Gaelic than English . . . ?</b> <i>[respondents who indicated that they use Gaelic for these purposes at least occasionally]</i>	yes (%) <i>All fluent speakers</i>	yes (%) <i>Fluent native speakers</i>	yes (%) <i>Fluent learners</i>
listening to the radio	53	51	56
in the workplace	24	27	7
at school / college/ university <sup>13</sup>	22	21	22
on the telephone	21	21	24
in friends' or relatives' homes	17	17	18
in conversations in the street	12	10	17
in pubs, restaurants or cafés	9	14	0
watching television	8	5	18
reading or writing letters	7	3	19
using the Internet	4	0	13
reading books, magazines or newspapers	2	2	0
in shops	0	0	0

59% of respondents (62 individuals) indicated that they were involved in a Gaelic organisation or organisations, and 41% stated that they were not.<sup>14</sup> Membership rates were highest in the fluent learner group (94%), and lowest in the fluent native speaker group (42%). This pattern is fairly understandable, in that fluent learners, and indeed those respondents with only limited Gaelic who chose to participate in this survey, can be said to have 'sought out' Gaelic in some sense, which is not necessarily true (in the same way at least) for fluent native speakers. Similarly, it is hardly surprising that membership in Comann nam Pàrant is higher among people who have school-age children, or that the rate of membership in Clì Gàidhlig (one of whose principal purposes is to serve Gaelic learners) is much higher among those who learned Gaelic to fluency than among the fluent native speakers (56% compared to 6%).

**Table 23**

<b>Membership in Gaelic organisations</b>	<i>Number of members</i>
An Comunn Gaidhealach	26
Clì Gàidhlig	20
FÀS (Dùn Èideann)	18
Comann nam Pàrant	11
Lothian Gaelic Choir	9
Cluicheadairean Gàidhlig Dhùn Èideann	5
Greyfriars Church	4
Sradagan	4
Cearcall Còmhraidh Dhùn Èideann	2
Edinburgh Gaelic Choir	2
Edinburgh University Highland Society	2
Comunn na Gàidhlig	2
other	5

The majority of respondents indicated that they attend Gaelic events in Edinburgh, but for most of them this did not appear to be a daily, weekly or even monthly occurrence.<sup>15</sup> For example, 73% of respondents indicate that they attend traditional ceilidhs, but for two-thirds of them this only happens once or twice a year. As such, it appears that public Gaelic events do not play a particularly important role in the social lives of Edinburgh's Gaelic speakers.

**Table 24**

<b>How often do you attend Gaelic events held in Edinburgh? (%)</b>	<i>All respondents</i>	<i>Fluent native speakers</i>	<i>Fluent learners</i>
traditional ceilidhs	73	75	78
>10 times/year	5	4	17
> 6-10 times/year	6	8	6
> 3-5 times/year	14	17	6
> 1-2 times/year	49	46	50
Gaelic concerts / fèisean, or local mòds	59	65	61
>10 times/year	1	2	0
> 6-10 times/year	6	4	11
> 3-5 times/year	11	13	6
> 1-2 times/year	41	46	44
Gaelic plays	57	75	61
>10 times/year	1	2	0
> 6-10 times/year	1	2	0
> 3-5 times/year	5	8	6
> 1-2 times/year	50	63	56

Gaelic-medium cultural or academic conferences	43	46	72
>10 times/year	0	0	0
> 6-10 times/year	1	0	6
> 3-5 times/year	4	2	11
> 1-2 times/year	38	44	56
Gaelic church services	40	48	33
> 50 times/year	4	2	11
> 20 times/year	3	4	6
> 10-20 times/year	4	2	6
> 5-9 times/year	7	10	6
> 1-4 times/year	23	29	6
Gaelic-related political meetings or gatherings	37	31	56
>10 times/year	4	4	11
> 6-10 times/year	5	0	11
> 3-5 times/year	5	2	11
> 1-2 times/year	24	25	22
Gaelic storytelling events	36	38	56
>10 times/year	0	0	0
> 6-10 times/year	0	0	6
> 3-5 times/year	1	0	6
> 1-2 times/year	34	38	44

## (6) Gaelic-medium education

Some of the most significant findings in this research involve the data concerning Gaelic-medium education (GME). To a substantial extent, the parents who chose GME for their children are not themselves fluent Gaelic speakers: among the respondents with children in GME, 78% were not fluent speakers. On the other hand, 86% of the fluent native speakers with children of school age did not have them enrolled in GME.<sup>16</sup>

This pattern presents a major challenge for the maintenance and development of Gaelic in Edinburgh, in that GME, and Tollcross Primary School, where the Gaelic unit is located, might provide the basis for building a new Gaelic community in the city.

**Table 25**

<b>If you have children of school age, are they enrolled in Gaelic-medium education?</b>	<i>All respondents</i>	<i>Fluent native speakers</i>	<i>Fluent learners</i>
yes	11 (35%)	1 (7%)	2 (50%)
some are	1 (3%)	1 (7%)	0
no	19 (61%)	12 (86%)	2 (50%)

The parents who participated in this study indicated that they had chosen GME for a range of reasons, but most parents emphasised the importance of keeping Gaelic alive and the value of bilingualism. As might be expected, given that so few children of fluent Gaelic-speaking respondents are receiving GME, few parents made this choice because they wanted their children to be educated in their mother tongue.

**Table 26**

<b>If you have a child / children enrolled in Gaelic-medium education, why did you choose this kind of education for them? (%)</b>	<i>All respondents</i>
I want to keep Gaelic alive	28
I want my child / children to be bilingual	28
I believe that Gaelic-medium education is superior to English-medium education	19
Gaelic is my mother tongue	5
Gaelic is my child's / children's mother tongue	5
the classes are smaller than they are in mainstream education	5
other	7
don't know / not sure	5

On the other hand, there may be some grounds for encouragement in the reasons why parents *did not* choose GME. Very few expressed concerns about the value or quality of GME. For example, none of the fluent native speakers stated that they had not chosen GME because they did not 'have complete confidence in Gaelic-medium education' or because they 'believe that Gaelic-medium education holds children back'. For these fluent speakers, it appears that their choices were motivated by family considerations: most stated that they had chosen English-medium education because their partners did not speak Gaelic or because English is their children's mother tongue.<sup>17</sup> Such responses do demonstrate a lack of language loyalty, however: if English is the children's mother tongue, this suggests that Gaelic was not spoken enough to them in the home (a finding in line with the information presented in section 3 of this report).

**Table 27**

<b>If you have a child / children of school age that is / are not enrolled in Gaelic-medium education, why did you not choose Gaelic-medium education for them? (%)</b>	<i>All respondents</i>	<i>Fluent native speakers</i>	<i>Fluent learners</i>
English is my child's / children's mother tongue	21	27	0
my partner doesn't speak Gaelic	17	27	0
they didn't receive preschool education in Gaelic	17	7	20
transport problems	10	7	40
I believe that English-medium education is superior to Gaelic-medium education	7	7	20
I wasn't interested in Gaelic when the children started school	7	7	0
I believe that Gaelic-medium education holds children back	3	0	0
I wasn't satisfied with the school where Gaelic-medium education is offered	3	0	20
I don't have full confidence in Gaelic-medium education	0	0	0
I didn't know that Gaelic-medium education was available	0	0	0
other	14	20	0

## **(7) Opinions concerning Gaelic**

Respondents were given a number of questions concerning people's views about Gaelic in Edinburgh, perceptions of Gaelic in general, and public policy relating to the language.

The respondents were strongly of the view that promoting Gaelic in Edinburgh is a worthwhile objective: 72% stated that this was either 'important' or 'very important' and only 5% that it was 'not really very important' or 'not important at all'. There were significant differences, however, between respondents' own opinions and their impression of views held by others, both Gaelic speakers in the Highlands & Islands and, especially, the general population of Edinburgh. Respondents felt that the great majority of Edinburgh residents are not supportive of promoting Gaelic in the city: 34% respondents felt that Edinburgh residents generally would feel this was not important at all, and a further 36% that it was not really very important.<sup>18</sup> This survey suggests that Edinburgh's Gaelic community perceives itself as a minority surrounded by an indifferent majority.

**Table 28**

	<b>In your view, how important is it to promote Gaelic in Edinburgh? (%)</b>	<b>In your view, what do Gaelic speakers who live in the Highlands and Islands think about promoting Gaelic in Edinburgh? (%)</b>	<b>In your view, what do Edinburgh residents in general think about promoting Gaelic in Edinburgh? (%)</b>
very important	52	9	3
important	20	11	9
fairly important, but not as important as promoting Gaelic in the Highlands and Islands	21	35	11
not really very important	3	18	36
not important at all	2	2	34
don't know / not sure	2	25	7

Respondents were given an opportunity to expand on and explain their views in relation to these questions. As might be expected, there were diverse opinions.

With regard to the importance of developing Gaelic in Edinburgh, a number of respondents emphasised Edinburgh's status as the national capital and home of the Scottish Parliament. For these respondents it is critical that Gaelic is accorded appropriate status in Edinburgh. For example: 'Edinburgh purports to be the capital city of Scotland; Gaelic is the traditional language of a major part of the country. Therefore Gaelic should play a major part in the life of the city'.

Several respondents emphasised the importance of urban Gaelic communities for perceptions of the language:

- 'Tha a' Ghàidhlig a' fulang air sgàth na h-ìomhaigh a th'aice mar chàinain a tha "a-muigh air an dùthaich", is mairidh a' bheachd sin mura faicear sna bailtean mòra i' [Gaelic suffers as a result of its image as something 'way out in the country', and this view will survive unless it is seen in the cities]

Others were rather doubtful:

- 'Ma tha a' Ghàidhlig a' dol a shoirbheachadh, feumaidh i a bhith air a bruidhinn gu nàdarra leis a' mhòr-shluagh sa choimhearsnachd, agus cha thachair sin ann an Dùn Èideann' [If Gaelic is to thrive, it has to be spoken naturally by a majority in the community, and that won't happen in Edinburgh]
- 'Cha chum thu Gàidhlig beò le buidheann beag de luchd-ionnsachaidh a' gabhail tì le chèile ann an Dùn Èideann; mura bheil a' chlann ann an Lìonaclait no Port Rìgh ga bruidhinn eatorra fhèin!' [You won't keep Gaelic alive with a

small group of learners having tea together in Edinburgh, unless children in Lionacleit [Benbecula] or Portree speak it among themselves!]

With regard to perceptions of how Gaelic speakers in the Highlands and Islands view Gaelic in Edinburgh, a range of views were expressed:

- ‘Chan eil fhios aca gu bheil mòran dhaoine anns na bailtean a bhios a’ bruidhinn Gàidhlig’ [They don’t know that they are a lot of Gaelic speakers in the cities]
- ‘The Gaelic speakers I know from the islands are amused about people learning Gaelic in Edinburgh’
- ‘Most native speakers in my family would prefer the language retained its heartland and survived in an ‘authentic’ setting. They are sceptical about its future otherwise’
- ‘In certain parts of the Highlands and Islands Gaelic is tied up with economic development. Some people resent funding for Gaelic being allocated to the Lowlands. I also suspect that some people associate Edinburgh with the establishment and anti-Highland sentiment’
- ‘I think those in the Gaidhealtachd recognise Edinburgh’s importance in Gaelic more as a centre for lobbying’

Most responses concerning the views of the general Edinburgh population were rather negative:

- ‘Chan eil e cudromach do mhuintir Dhùn Èideann ma tha Gàidhlig beò no marbh’ [The people of Edinburgh don’t care whether Gaelic lives or dies]
- ‘Chan eil iad a’ smaoinichadh gu bheil ceangal sam bith aig Gàidhlig ri baile Dhùn Èideann. Tha mòran dhiubh aineolach de Ghàidhlig’ [They don’t think there is any connection between Gaelic and the city of Edinburgh. A lot of them are ignorant about Gaelic]
- ‘Chan e rud a th’ann a tha cur dragh mòr sam bith orra — cha bhuin a’ Ghàidhlig do dhualchas an àite’ [It’s not something that bothers them at all – Gaelic isn’t part of the heritage of the city]
- ‘People in Edinburgh still associate Gaelic with whisky, shortbread and the Highlands!’
- ‘Gaelic has a low profile in Edinburgh and residents follow the lead of the Council and the *Evening News* in considering the language to be irrelevant and a drain on resources’

Some respondents perceived a degree of anti-Gaelic prejudice in the city, but others disagreed:

- ‘S ann a shaoileas mi gu bheil cuid aca a’ coimhead sìos orm airson gu bheil Gàidhlig agam agus blas Gàidhealach air mo chainnt’ [I feel that some of them look down on me because I speak Gaelic and have a Highland accent (in English)]

- 'I feel that most people perceive Gaelic as a language which should be treated as a hobby . . . but not something which merits having serious money spent on it. I don't think there is an anti-Gaelic feeling though'

Similarly, respondents felt that the Scottish Executive and Edinburgh City Council are generally unsupportive of Gaelic. Respondents were asked to indicate on a scale of 1-10 how supportive they felt the Executive and Council are. The average score for the Executive was 3.41 and the average for the Council 2.57. It is noteworthy that when questions of this kind were asked in the Euromosaic survey in 1994 respondents were considerably less negative in their view of these governmental bodies (Euromosaic 1995: Table 27).

**Table 29**

<b>In your view, on a scale of 1 to 10, how interested are these bodies in Gaelic?<sup>19</sup></b>	<i>Scottish Executive (%)</i>	<i>City of Edinburgh Council (%)</i>
1	21	43
2	13	14
3	23	12
4	16	12
5	12	14
6	7	3
7	6	2
8	1	0
9	1	0
10	0	0

The respondents themselves expressed a strong attachment to Gaelic. In response to the question 'On a scale of 1 to 10, how interested are you in Gaelic?', 52% gave the answer '10' and the average mark was 8.67.

Other questions were addressed to the general status of Gaelic and public perceptions of the language. Respondents felt strongly that Gaelic is a national language that is important to all of Scotland, and that it is important that young children learn the language, but views concerning the health and vigour of the language were more mixed. 38% agreed or agreed strongly that Gaelic is dying, but 39% disagreed or disagreed strongly; 42% agreed or agreed strongly that most people view things associated with Gaelic as 'too old-fashioned', but 37% disagreed or disagreed strongly.

These questions were also asked in connection with the Euromosaic project in 1994 but the results were very different (Euromosaic 1995: Table 26). In that research, only 18% stated that they agreed or agreed strongly that Gaelic is dying, while 67% disagreed strongly; 25% agreed or agreed strongly that most people that most people view things associated with Gaelic as too old-fashioned, but 57% disagreed or disagreed strongly. This survey was conducted at a national level (including some interviews in Edinburgh and Glasgow) and it may be that Gaelic speakers in the Highlands & Islands have a different view from urban Gaelic speakers. Of course, it may also be that opinion has shifted somewhat in recent years.

**Table 30**

<b>How do you feel about the following statements?</b> (%)	'Gaelic is important for Scotland as a whole'	'Gaelic is a dying language'	'Most people view things associated with Gaelic as too old-fashioned'	'It is important that young children learn Gaelic'
agree strongly	68	7	4	66
agree	25	31	38	29
neither agree nor disagree	3	11	14	4
disagree	5	30	30	0
disagree strongly	0	9	7	1
don't know / not sure	0	11	7	0

Overall, there were no distinct differences with regard to the responses received from different categories of respondents (fluent speakers v. those not fluent in Gaelic, for example). However, there was a significant divergence with regard to the way Gaelic was perceived by fluent native speakers on the one hand and fluent learners on the other, and between younger and older respondents.

**Table 31**

<b>'Most people view things associated with Gaelic as too old-fashioned'</b> (%)	<i>age 16-34</i>	<i>age 55+</i>	<i>Fluent native speakers</i>	<i>Fluent learners</i>
agree strongly	11	0	0	11
agree	50	28	37	50
neither agree nor disagree	17	14	11	11
disagree	11	36	37	22
disagree strongly	0	11	7	0
don't know / not sure	11	11	9	5

A number of respondents took the opportunity to give their views on these questions in more detail. Most agreed that Gaelic should have a national status but others were more doubtful:

- ‘Gaelic is Scotland’s native tongue and culture. Scots as a whole should be made more aware of this’
- ‘The language is integral to the culture and history of the country. To undermine one is to undermine the other’
- ‘Tha buaidh aig/air a bhith aig a’ Ghàidhlig air gach uile ceàrnaidh de dh’Alba. Anns an latha an-diugh, tha i a’ buntainn a cheart cho làidir ris na bailtean mòra ’s a tha i ris a’ Ghàidhealtachd’ [Gaelic has/had an impact on every part of Scotland. Today, it belongs just as much to the cities as it does to the Highlands and Islands]
- ‘Seo an aon àite air thalamh far a bheil a’ Ghàidhlig ga bruidhinn agus ma leigeas Alba leatha bàsachadh cailidh an saoghal i’ [This is the only place in the world where Gaelic is spoken and if Scotland allows it to die the world will lose it entirely]
- ‘Chan eil fhios agam ciamar is urrainn dhan a’ Ghàidhlig a bhith cudromach far nach robh i air a cleachdadh a-riamh is far nach eil eòlas air cultar agus eachdraidh nan Gàidheal’ [I don’t know how Gaelic can be important where it was never used and where there is no knowledge of Gaelic culture or history]

Respondents also expressed different opinions as to whether Gaelic is dying. There were different interpretations of what ‘dying’ might mean, and of what can be done to strengthen Gaelic at this stage.

Some of those who agreed that Gaelic is dying gave straightforward explanations for their view:

- ‘Chan eil gu leòr clann ga bruidhinn no gu leòr inbhich ga h-ionnsachadh agus chan eil gu leòr ga dhèanamh airson a’ chùis a leasachadh’ [Not enough children are speaking it, not enough adults are learning it and not enough is being done to improve things]
- ‘Chan eil clann nan Gàidheal ga bruidhinn’ [Gaelic speakers’ children don’t speak it]
- ‘Tha a’ Ghàidhlig mar a dh’ionnsaich mis’ i, a’ bàsachadh. Chaidh mise dhan sgoil a dh’ionnsachadh [Beurla] ach tha a’ chlann anns a’ bhaile far na dh’èirich mi, a-nise dol dhan sgoil a dh’ionnsachadh Gàidhlig. Chan eil i aca bho ghluin na màthar! ’S e rud acadaimigeach a th’ann a-nis’ [Gaelic, in the way I learned it, is dying. I went to school to learn English but in the village where I grew up the children now go to school to learn Gaelic. They don’t have Gaelic from their mother’s knee. It’s something academic now]

Others found reasons for optimism: that the number of children in Gaelic education is increasing; that the language has more of a presence in the media, which helps to change perceptions of the language; and that more children are taking part in the Gaelic arts than in decades past.

- ‘In its old form it is dying or half dead already but revival is bringing [a] new form that can hopefully be sustained’

- ‘Gheibh i bàs ceart gu leòr mura dèanar barrachd leasachadh air foghlam. Tha cus airgid a’ dol a-steach do phròiseactan nach eil idir a’ buntainn ri “Joe Bloggs” aig a bheil Gàidhlig’ [It will certainly die if there isn’t additional improvement in terms of education. Too much money is going into projects that don’t have any significance for ordinary Gaelic speakers]
- ‘I feel it is floundering and this is a crucial time. The Scottish Executive has the power at this stage to direct it either way’

Lively views were expressed concerning public perceptions of Gaelic, especially with regard to the ‘old-fashionedness’ of the language:

- ‘Prior to [my] kids joining GME, I probably would have agreed but [now] see “normal” kids leading “normal” lives, just being educated in Gaelic’
- ‘A thaobh ealain, ’s e cuspairean seann-fhasanta bhios a’ mhòr-shluagh a’ faicinn. ’S e òrain sheann-fhasanta bhios sinn a’ seinn agus tha seo a’ sealltainn gu bheil sinn a’ coimhead air ais, mar gum biodh sinn ag iarraidh tilleadh chun na làithean a dh’fhalbh ’s nach till’ [With regard to the arts, most of what people see is old songs. We do sing old songs and this shows that we look backwards, as if we were wanting to return to days gone by that will never actually return]
- ‘B’ àbhaist i a bhith ceannairceach agus seann-fhasanta; a-nis [tha i] fasanta — gu sònraichte le [daoine] ‘middle class’, ach feumaidh Gàidhlig a bhith “cool” le daoine òg, 11-25’ [It used to be barbarous and old-fashioned; now it’s fashionable, especially with middle-class people, but Gaelic needs to be ‘cool’ to young people, 11-25]
- ‘Often efforts to update Gaelic and make it fashionable are patently contrived and just as hopeless in attracting younger speakers’
- ‘Dè tha ceàrr air a bhith seann-fhasanta?’ [What’s wrong with being old-fashioned?]
- ‘Most people have been given, or only allowed, a negative view of Gaelic’
- ‘This is a minority view expressed by vociferous supporters of efforts to convert Scotland into a region of England’

The great majority of respondents felt it was vitally important that young children learn Gaelic. They emphasised in particular the importance of increasing the presence of Gaelic in secondary schools, strengthening the links between youth and older speakers, and maintaining strong connections between Gaelic education and traditional Gaelic culture. Some expressed hope that things are turning for the better: ‘My age-group has suffered many negative influences where Gaelic is concerned — influences that hopefully do not affect the younger generations who with the right encouragement will be proud of their language’.

## **Conclusion**

The results of this research project demonstrate the scale of the challenges involved in efforts to promote Gaelic in Edinburgh, and in similar urban environments where the proportion of Gaelic speakers is minimal. Gaelic language use is extremely low: in the home, in social settings, in the workplace. Clearly, very few people in Edinburgh live their lives through Gaelic. While it is probably not realistic to expect that Edinburgh can become a Gaelic city, or indeed a bilingual city in any meaningful sense, efforts should be made to make 'living through Gaelic' possible for those who would wish this. Unless structures and opportunities are put in place that will make such a choice possible for Gaelic speakers, Edinburgh will not be able to play an important role in the revitalisation of Gaelic. The City of Edinburgh Council has committed itself to preparing a Gaelic Language Plan following the enactment of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act, and this plan will be critical for the development of such structures and opportunities.

This research is no more than a preliminary investigation and perhaps it raises more questions than it answers. Further research of this kind is urgently needed, not only with regard to Gaelic in urban contexts but also in Highland areas where the language is stronger. Indeed, a national survey, of the kind commissioned in Wales and especially in the Basque Country, would be extremely useful. Detailed information on the sociolinguistic situation is essential if Gaelic development policies are to be effective. A solid base of sociolinguistic information is a necessary foundation for any progress in this area.

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# APPENDIX

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Valuable research is currently being conducted in connection with the Western Isles Language Plan, under the supervision of Professor Kenneth MacKinnon. In addition, Dr Kurt Duwe has prepared a number of local studies (Duwe 2003-04) on the linguistic situation of different communities in the Highlands & Islands, examining patterns over 120 years of census data and closely analysing the trends and developments of recent years.

<sup>2</sup>The nine groups are as follows: (1) Managers and senior officials, (2) Professional occupations, (3) Associate professional and technical occupations, (4) Administrative and secretarial occupations, (5) Skilled trades occupations, (6) Personal service occupations, (7) Sales and customer service occupations, (8) Process, plant and machine operatives, and (9) Elementary occupations.

<sup>3</sup>When the term 'fluent speaker' is used in this report, it refers to the self-ascription given in response to this question. The term 'native speaker' is defined in relation to where respondents learned Gaelic, as explained above (text adjoining Table 7).

<sup>4</sup>The questionnaire was not distributed to children under the age of 16. Several responses were received from secondary school pupils, but unfortunately very few were returned by those in the 18-24 age group, even though the questionnaire was widely distributed among Edinburgh University students.

<sup>5</sup>Among the fluent learners who claimed equal fluency in Gaelic and English, one was a native speaker of a third language who had learned both Gaelic and English as foreign languages. It might well be that this respondent would not claim equal fluency in Gaelic and his/her mother tongue.

<sup>6</sup>In addition, the Gaelic version of the questionnaire was chosen by 9 people who claimed to write Gaelic only 'with difficulty' and indeed by 1 person who claimed not to be able to write Gaelic at all. It is important to make clear that completion of the questionnaire did not actually require a great deal of writing; in most cases all that was needed was to tick the appropriate box. Furthermore, several people completed the Gaelic questionnaire but wrote in their additional comments in English.

<sup>7</sup>Respondents were permitted to give more than one answer here: as such respondents could indicate, for example, that they learned Gaelic both at home and at school. Different native speakers had different interpretations of this question, however: some stated that they had learned Gaelic both at home and by living in a Gaelic-speaking community, while others, who also grew up in Gaelic-speaking communities, simply indicated that they had learned Gaelic at home. Accordingly, the group of respondents who claimed to have learned Gaelic through living in a Gaelic-speaking community includes both learners and 'native speakers'.

<sup>8</sup> Respondents were permitted to give more than one answer here: as such respondents could indicate that they had lived in more than one place while acquiring Gaelic. In such cases an allocation was made between the different places involved: for example, if a respondent gave 'Edinburgh and Skye' in response to this question, Edinburgh would be weighted at 0.5 and Skye at 0.5.

<sup>9</sup>There must, of course, be some doubt about the actual linguistic abilities of those children receiving Gaelic-medium education whose parents claimed them as Gaelic speakers but who live in homes where little or no Gaelic is spoken.

<sup>10</sup>Respondents made clear that the situation here is complex and fluid. For example, some respondents had children living with them and thus they spoke to each other every day; for others, their children are now adults and interaction is less frequent and intensive. In addition, some respondents explained that they speak Gaelic to their children but receive replies in English.

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<sup>11</sup>This question was confined to parents with more than one child actually living with them, as parents would otherwise be unable to observe their childrens' practices with each other.

<sup>12</sup>The term 'strangers' was not defined in the questionnaire and could conceivably have been interpreted to include individuals overheard at Gaelic events with whom the respondent was not personally acquainted. However, the low numbers provided in the responses suggest that most respondents interpreted the term in line with the researcher's intentions, i.e. people encountered in the ordinary course of daily life in Edinburgh.

<sup>13</sup>This result does not include respondents who work in schools/universities/colleges. For these respondents their use of Gaelic in this environment is classified as 'workplace'. Among those respondents who claimed to use Gaelic in school/university/college, it is important to remember that a number of them would be involved in Gaelic courses or classes at such institutions, and that the proportion using Gaelic is pushed up accordingly.

<sup>14</sup>Of those who did not indicate membership in Gaelic organisations, it may be that some misunderstood the question or skipped over it. The bare question 'Are you involved in any Gaelic organisations?' was not asked; instead, respondents were asked to mark those groups in which they are involved.

<sup>15</sup>The questionnaire was distributed before Bothan, the successful Gaelic 'night club', was established. Bothan takes place once a month and usually attracts some 30-50 people.

<sup>16</sup>This finding is in line with a recent report on GME in the Highlands and Islands (Stockdale et al. 2003), which showed that parents who had moved into the area from England were more likely to choose GME for their children than were fluent 'local' Gaelic-speaking parents.

<sup>17</sup>'Mother tongue' is used here (and was used in the questionnaire) to mean 'first language' or 'native language', not necessarily the language of the children's mother.

<sup>18</sup>The respondents might be unduly pessimistic in this regard: in a survey of the general Scottish public conducted in 2003 by Market Research UK, 25% of respondents stated that promoting Gaelic was very important and a further 41% that it was important, as against only 9% who said this was not important and 4% who said it was not at all important (Market Research UK 2003). However, these respondents were asked about promoting Gaelic in general, rather than in the urban Lowlands; some of these respondents would certainly hold the view that it is important to promote Gaelic in the Highlands & Islands, but not in other parts of Scotland.

<sup>19</sup>1-10 was the numerical range specified in the questionnaire, but some respondents gave zero or even -10 in reply. All replies of this kind were classified as '1'.