

Scottish Gaelic in Business

December 2021

Background and Summary

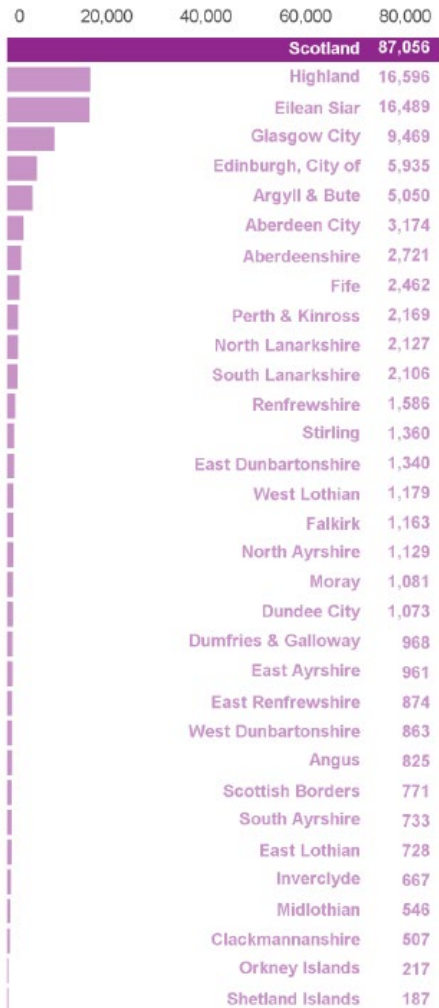
- *With Scottish Enterprise submitting its first Gaelic Language Plan to Bòrd na Gàidhlig in 2022, the Insights and Economics Team were asked by Strategy to carry out some exploratory work on the language and whether there is any research on the benefit to businesses.*

Key Findings:

- The majority of Gaelic speakers **live in rural Scotland – predominantly -the Highlands and Islands (75%)** but new learners are growing in the major cities thanks to the rise in Gaelic Medium Education (GME).
- Economy Sectors with higher proportions of Gaelic speakers are- **Education, Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing and Creative industries. Again, predominantly sectors found in rural areas.**
- There is [evidence](#) to show that the use of minority languages **can positively impact on an economy particularly labour market outcomes.**
- Another [study](#) showed the potential economic value of Gaelic as an asset to the Scottish economy could be in the region of **between £82M and £149M**
- **Benefits to businesses include:**
 - enhancing **distinctiveness/ uniqueness** of products and services
 - enhancing perceptions of **authenticity and provenance**
 - increasing **appeal** of products/services to target markets

Location of Gaelic Speakers

Number of people aged 3 and over with any skills in Gaelic

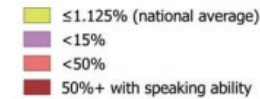


Percentage of people aged 3 and over with any skills in Gaelic



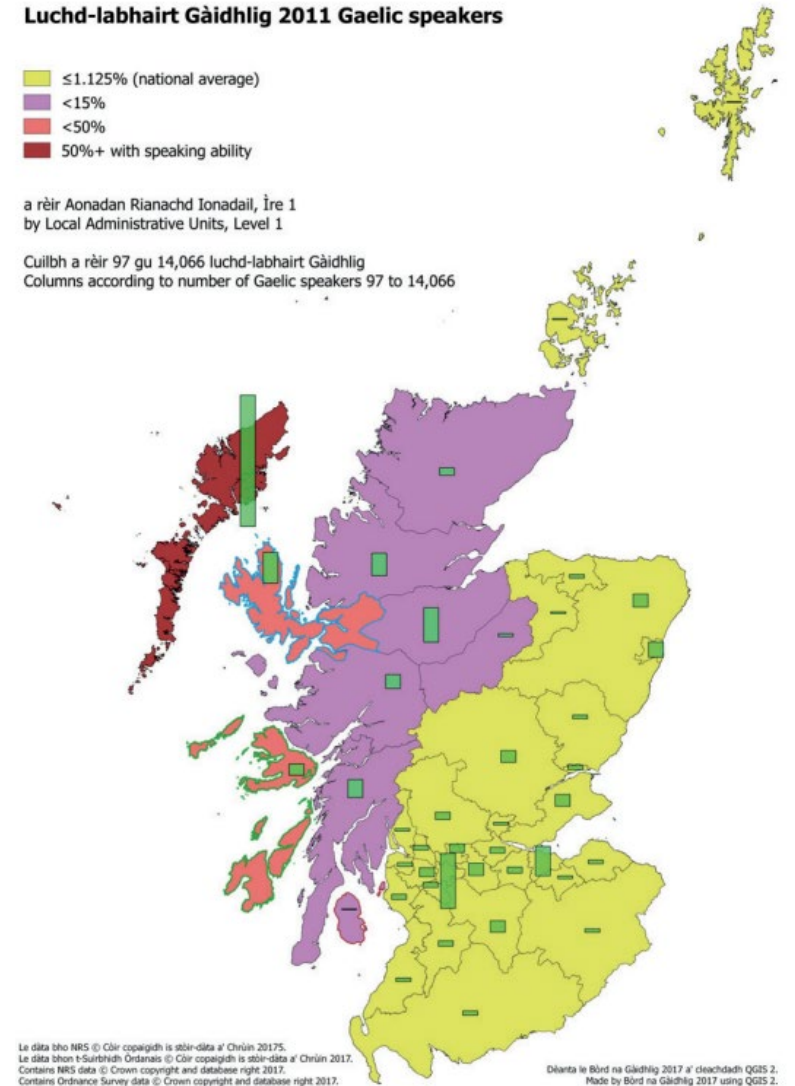
- According to the most recent estimates, there are **just over 87k Gaelic speakers**.
- **74.5%** of Gaelic speakers live in Eilean Siar, Highland or Argyll and Bute.
- 52.3% of Eilean Siar residents could speak Gaelic
- Just **6%** of speakers are located in the major cities. Though there are signs of this shifting.

Luchd-labhairt Gàidhlig 2011 Gaelic speakers



a rèir Anadan Rianachd Ionadail, Ìre 1
by Local Administrative Units, Level 1

Cuilbh a rèir 97 gu 14,066 luchd-labhairt Gàidhlig
Columns according to number of Gaelic speakers 97 to 14,066



Le dàta bhon NRS © Còir copairigh is abair-dàta a' Chrìon 2017.
Le dàta bhon N-Sairbhith Ordnans © Còir copairigh is abair-dàta a' Chrìon 2017.
Contains NRS data © Crown copyright and database right 2017.
Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2017.

Dèanta le Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2017 a' cleachdadh QGIS 2.
Made by Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2017 using QGIS 2.

Characteristics of Gaelic Speakers



Source: [Scottish Census 2011](#)

Compared with the Scottish average, Gaelic speakers are:

- **Older** (24% are over the age of 65, compared with 17%)
- Are **more likely to come from a high socio-economic group** with 36.9% in a professional occupation compared with 33.7%
- **Less likely to come from semi-routine or routine occupations** (25.5% compared with 28.6%).
- More likely to have a **university level degree qualification** (35.9% compared with 27%)
- **Lower proportion of people with no qualifications** (37% compared with 47.3%).
- Between 2001 and 2011 there **were 2k fewer Gaelic speakers** (-3.4%)
- However, there was a **slight rise in the number of under 20s** who could speak Gaelic – a possible consequence of the increase in Gaelic Medium Education.

Sectors that Use Gaelic

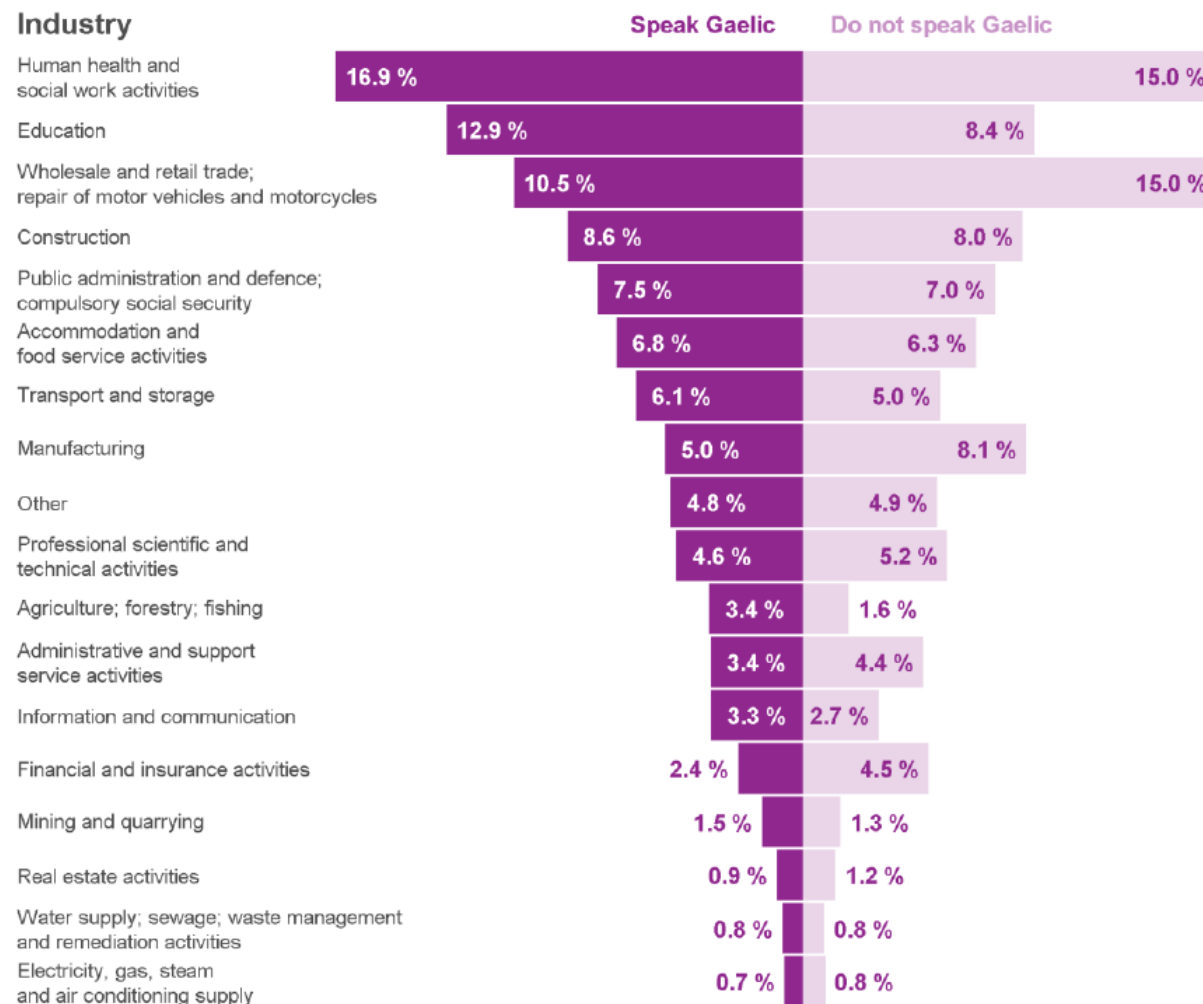
Table 6: Percentage Gaelic speakers by occupation, 2011

SOC 2010 code	Occupation	% Gaelic speakers
5411	Weavers and knitters	14.2
8232	Marine and waterways transport operatives	8.0
3513	Ship and hovercraft officers	5.7
5119	Other skilled agriculture and related trades	5.4
1116	Elected officers and representatives	5.1
3416	Arts officers, producers and directors	4.8
9119	Fishing and other elementary agriculture occupations n.e.c.	3.8
3415	Musicians	3.6
2444	Clergy	3.5
2452	Archivists and curators	3.2
2471	Journalists, newspaper and periodical editors	3.1
5236	Boat and ship builders and repairers	2.8
6219	Leisure and travel service occupations n.e.c.	2.7
3412	Authors, writers and translators	2.7
2318	Education advisers and school inspectors	2.6
3413	Actors, entertainers and presenters	2.5
2319	Teaching and other educational professionals n.e.c.	2.4
1221	Hotel and accommodation managers and proprietors	2.4
8126	Water and sewerage plant operatives	2.3
2315	Primary and nursery education teaching professionals	2.2
8229	Mobile machine drivers and operatives n.e.c.	2.1
5214	Metal plate workers and riveters	2.1
6125	Teaching assistants	2.1
1211	Managers and proprietors in agriculture and horticulture	2.1
2232	Midwives	2.0

i.e.c.: not elsewhere classified

For people aged 16 to 74 in employment, the incidence of people with any skills in Gaelic was higher than the overall average for 'Education', 'Agriculture, forestry and fishing' and 'Information and communication'

Figure 11: Industry distribution by Gaelic-speaking ability, Scotland, 2011



Source: [Scottish Census 2011](#)

Minority Languages and the Economy

A [2014 study by the Welsh Government](#) reviewed the literature on the link between minority languages (with a focus on Welsh) and the economy. It found that:

- There was robust evidence of **a positive relationship between knowledge of Welsh**, or other language relevant to the Welsh linguistic context, **and earnings, employment or occupational status**.
- robust survey evidence of **the perceived value of Welsh language skills among business** managers and levels of use in some businesses, as well as evidence of some consumers' preferences for Welsh language services
- Some businesses consider **staff with Welsh language skills to be an asset** to their business as it enables them to meet some of their customers' linguistic preferences
- Economic assessments and other studies examined provide a wealth of descriptive evidence and examples of **direct and indirect links between language related activities and economic outcomes** (e.g. job creation, expenditure, turnover, GVA).

/

It is likely that the same benefits to the economy from Welsh could also be attributed to Gaelic.



Benefits of Using Gaelic for Businesses

According to a [2014 Study](#) for Highlands and Islands Enterprise, which consulted with over 300 businesses, over 60% of responding businesses used Gaelic. The study found:

- **Almost 70% of businesses consulted said that Gaelic is an asset to their main business/enterprise activity**, with the greater representation of these being in creative industries, heritage, education/ learning and community sectors. Benefits included:
 - enhancing distinctiveness/ uniqueness of products and services
 - enhancing perceptions of authenticity and provenance
 - increasing appeal of products/services to target markets
 - increases pride in the community
 - increases job related opportunities
 - mutual benefits to business and community (enhancing experiences; wider benefits from helping promote and sustain the language; better connectivity with the local area and its history; economies of scale; increased educational opportunities)
- Businesses that identified Gaelic as being critically important are most commonly in **creative industries sectors (e.g. music, art, design, performance, theatre, media, publishing, digital/ICT)**. Other businesses that identify Gaelic as critically important include those in the heritage and learning sectors.
- Gaelic speaking staff are seen as a [unique selling point](#) for Scottish businesses

Benefits of Using Gaelic for Businesses

For particular sectors:

- **Tourism** – two markets for Gaelic: Gaelic speaking/learning market (i.e. ‘internal Gaelic tourism’), and also a more general (national/international) market where the role of Gaelic is about enhancing the distinctiveness, differentiation, and the appeal to tourists of visiting specific locations (especially island locations) within Scotland (in effect a ‘volume market’).
- **Creative-** opportunities relate to the further development of the wide range of artistic, drama, literature, music and events and festivals related activity currently taking place through businesses and organisations – both those that communicate and express themselves (either mainly or exclusively) in Gaelic, and those for whom Gaelic is used as an enhancement or a feature.
- **Education-** future development of Gaelic as an economic and social asset.

The potential economic value of Gaelic as an asset to the Scottish economy could be in the region of **between £82M and £149M**

Challenges of Using Gaelic for Businesses

From the [same study](#), the following challenges were highlighted for businesses in using Gaelic:

- The general **capacity and resources of businesses** (and community organisations) - limiting their ability to increase the use of Gaelic due to capacity issues (staff ability and time), as well as resources required to develop the role of Gaelic in the business.
- The existing **(lack of) Gaelic knowledge and expertise** within the business or organisation. A lack of Gaelic (i.e. of Gaelic speakers and/or Gaelic literates) is a well-recognised barrier by many businesses – on both the supply side and demand side.
- A lack of Gaelic speakers with the relevant, **specific skills for the business**.
- Cultural barriers and issues – relating to actual and perceived issues around confidence, resistance to change, lack of priority and support given to Gaelic, **lack of awareness within businesses about the potential for Gaelic**, concerns around tokenism and narrow treatment of Gaelic as an economic asset.

Further Reading

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-government-gaelic-language-plan-2016-2021/pages/4/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jul/02/scots-gaelic-could-die-out-within-a-decade-study-finds>

<https://www.scotsman.com/heritage-and-retro/heritage/more-gaelic-to-be-used-at-scottish-government-under-plan-to-save-fragile-language-3309493>

<https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/gaelic/20182023-gaelic-language-plan.pdf>

<https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/documents/2011-census-gaelic-language-report/>

<http://www.soillse.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/Inge-Birnie-G%C3%A0idhlig-ga-bruidhinn-an-seo.pdf>

<https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/research-enterprise/res-themes/humanities-and-arts/language-sciences-institute/publications/the-gaelic-crisis-in-the-vernacular-community/>

<https://www.gaidhlig.scot/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/West-Graham-2011-Beachd-a-phobail-CR11-01-Public-attitudes.pdf>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-15443664>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-30004483>

<https://bellingram.co.uk/latest-news/the-bell-ingram-blog-spot/2021/march/gaelic-speaking-staff-are-a-unique-selling-point-for-scottish-businesses/ar-stòras-gàidhlig-executive-summary.pdf> (hie.co.uk)

<https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/44717/gaelic-language-executive-summary-lb-180511.pdf>

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299229959_Gaelic_and_the_Economy_Socio-economic_status_of_Gaelic_speakers_and_the_Cost-effectiveness_of_Language_Policies/link/56efd4ad08ae52f8ad7f7a34/download

<https://www.theguardian.com/small-business-network/2016/jun/20/let-languages-shout-out-your-business-benefits>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-26294575>