

Pod-chraoladh sa Ghàidhlig

Investigating the potential of social media for minority language development

Soillse Small Research Fund - Final Report (15 August 2012)

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The logo for SOILLSE, featuring the word 'SOILLSE' in a bold, sans-serif font. The letter 'O' is stylized with a sunburst or fan-like pattern. A horizontal line is positioned below the text.



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Sgoil nan Daonnachdan

1. Introduction

The main aims of the *Pod-chraoladh sa Ghàidhlig* project are:

- to investigate the potential for bottom-up, crowdsourced approaches to status and usage planning for minority and lesser-resourced languages;
- to plan, carry out and evaluate a targeted intervention to create a sustainable Gaelic-medium “podcasting scene” among the undergraduate students at the University of Glasgow;
- to recruit a group of ten fluent Gaelic-speaking students, and teach them how to plan, record, edit and publish podcasts on the internet;
- to conduct a quantitative and a qualitative evaluation of the project, with reference to podcasters, listeners, and Gaelic learners.

The structure of this report is as follows:

Section 2 presents some brief background and motivation for the project (p. 3).

Section 3 describes the methodology used in the research (p. 7).

Section 4 presents an evaluation of the podcasting part of the project (p. 13).

Section 5 presents some feedback on other social media efforts inspired by the project (p. 21).

2. Background

2.1. Technical background

The internet is simply a huge computer hardware network, incorporating billions of computers all of which:

- are physically linked together in some way, for example with coaxial or fibre-optic cabling or by high-frequency radio waves; and
- can all send and receive messages encoded in the same "communications protocol", i.e. the computers all speak and understand the same language (technically known as TCP/IP - the TCP bit refers to the way that all data is divided into fixed-sized "packets" before being transmitted across the network, and the IP bit allows every computer to have a unique name/address - the computer I am writing this on carried the unique IP address 192.168.2.2).

Although the internet is best imagined as a huge, distributed computer (inside which chunks of data are passed around), the world wide web is essentially a software program (or "service") which runs on this internet/computer. The web is not the only service running on the internet - other examples are email (SMTP), instant messaging (IRC), file sharing (FTP), internet telephony (VoIP), streaming video and audio (e.g. BBC iPlayer).

The web is essentially a global system of interlinked "documents" (called "webpages"), which are accessible, or navigable, over the internet by means of web browsing software (e.g. Netscape Navigator, Internet Explorer, Firefox). Webpages are encoded using a special formatting and hyperlinking language (HTML), are uniquely identified by "uniform resource locators" (URLs, e.g. <http://www.glasgow.ac.uk/index.html>), and are requested and sent using a special set of instructions (HTTP - the hypertext transfer protocol).

Since its public launch in 1993, the web has developed in two distinct phases. The first phase, from 1993-2000, was the era of the "read-only" web (or the "web-as-library"), where all that end-users could do with their web browser was read and navigate between webpages. In other words, information flowed in only one direction, from web publisher to web-user. Innovation during this era generally took a "publisher-centred" form, with a sharp divide between a small group of web-users who produced content, and a much larger group who only read content. The "killer app" of the first-generation web was the search engine, allowing web users to locate relevant webpages on particular topics.

The move from dial-up to broadband home internet connections, and the collapse of the "dot com" bubble in 2001, ushered in the Web 2.0 era - the era of the "read/write" web (or the "social web"). Under this model, end-users are not mere readers and navigators of pre-written content, but rather active participants in the process of content creation. This second-generation web is interactive and participatory - the most successful business models are no longer based on creating and publishing content, but rather on providing users with an online space to create and publish their own content.

Some characteristic Web 2.0 services are:

- **blogs** - online journals, including "micro-blogging" services such as Twitter;
- **wikis** - user-editable, collaboratively-produced websites, such as Wikipedia (the online encyclopedia), Medpedia (bringing together physicians, researchers and patients to advance medical treatment), Intellipedia (an online information-sharing platform for the US intelligence community);
- **folksonomies** - mass collaborative classification of data by "tagging" documents, photographs and videos, for example Delicious, Flickr, YouTube;
- **social networking** - a general term for the creation of online communities of interest, action and practice, where members can share experiences and information with friends, colleagues, and collaborators, e.g. Livejournal, MySpace, Facebook, Match.com, LinkedIn, Academia.edu.

The glue that holds Web 2.0 together, and facilitates all of these collaborative, participatory activities, is yet another communications protocol, this time for syndicating user-generated content automatically - Really Simple Syndication (RSS).

Whereas a webpage is a human-readable document (encoded in the HTML markup language for display by a web-browser), an RSS feed is best understood as a machine-readable alternative to a webpage. Both webpages and RSS feeds are documents which are locatable on the internet, but there is one crucial difference:

- **Webpages** are designed to be "visited" by web-users. If you want to read the content of a webpage, you need to start up your web-browser software, and type in the URL of the document you want to read. The web-browser will then download and display the document for you. Every time the webpage is updated, you need to visit it again to read the new information.
- **RSS feeds**, on the other hand, are designed to bring updates directly to you, without you needing to take the initiative to visit a webpage. As a web-user, all you need to do is use a piece of software called an "aggregator", and tell it you want it to monitor a particular RSS feed. Then the aggregator will periodically check the RSS feed and alert you to any updates which have been made.

RSS feeds are the mechanism behind some of the most important applications and services of Web 2.0. For example, they allow readers to be automatically informed whenever a particular blog or Twitter feed has been updated. In addition, they are used as part of wiki software, to allow editors to keep track of and police changes made to wiki pages.

2.2. Podcasting

Podcasting can best be thought of as "audio blogging".

A blog is an RSS feed whose content is made up of textual journal entries. Whenever the blogger posts a new entry, this is added directly to the blog's RSS feed, and any readers who have subscribed to this feed will be automatically alerted as to the update.

On the other hand, a podcast channel is an RSS feed whose content is made up of snippets of audio, typically in compressed MP3 format. Rather than write a textual journal entry, the podcaster records a spoken message, and then posts this message to the podcast channel. The new audio message is then automatically added to the podcast channel's RSS feed, allowing subscribers to be informed automatically of the update.

Of course, since any audio file can be added to an RSS feed, things can get much more interesting than this. Podcasters typically use audio editing software to create podcasts from many different snippets of recorded audio, mixing in music, sound effects and background noise. It is also possible to use video rather than audio to record posts - the resulting product is generally known as a video podcast, or "vodcast" for short.

2.3. Crowdsourcing

The combination of flexible internet hardware and an ingenious range of software services that have been invented to run on it has given us something that has been described as a "global machine for springing surprises".¹ This is a relatively neutral way of referring to the well-known "disruptive force" of the internet, which has led to most domains of human activity being revolutionised over the last 15 years. Tapscott and Williams (2010)² present a fairly comprehensive list of areas of business, public service and entertainment which have been "rebooted" by Web 2.0 - financial services, innovation and wealth creation, environmental protection and green energy, transportation, education, scientific research, healthcare, publishing, the music industry, film and television, government, regulatory systems, and political revolutions and regime change. It has indeed become commonplace to suffix the label "2.0" to most of these domains as a shorthand way of referring to the new paradigms, e.g. Healthcare 2.0, Publishing 2.0, Science 2.0, Government 2.0, etc.

One of the main ways in which the internet has affected traditional models of activity is simply by making communicative and collaborative behaviour quicker, cheaper and easier. In the language of economics, the "transaction costs" of coordinating complex activities have fallen dramatically. Before the internet, there was only one recognised way of lowering transaction costs sufficiently to allow for complex tasks to be achieved, known as "firm production". This involved creating a company or organisation to carry out the task, providing it with sufficient financing to do so, employing and paying workers to do the work,

¹ John Naughton: "From Gutenberg to Zuckerberg: What you really need to know about the internet", Quercus Books, 2011.

² Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams: "Macrowikinomics: Rebooting business and the world", Atlantic Books, 2010.

and establishing a top-down management structure to coordinate activity and incentivise staff.

Over the last 15 years however, we have seen the rise of a whole new model of economic activity, which has earned the name "commons-based peer production" (or "crowdsourcing"). This model involves using participatory internet services, such as wikis, to function as the coordinating mechanism for large-scale group activity. Workers are typically volunteers, motivated by non-monetary goals to participate in the activity. The reduction in transaction costs brought about by the existence of the internet means in many cases that overt management is not required - the community of volunteers is self-organising. Whereas Encyclopedia Britannica uses the firm production model, Wikipedia is a textbook example of commons-based peer production.

In this context, one of the more general aims of the *Pod-chraoladh sa Ghàidhlig* research project is to take the first steps in exploring the potential of the internet as both a creative and a disruptive force in the domain of government known as "language planning". What are the implications of the commons-based peer production model for coordinating language revitalisation activity? What might "Language Planning 2.0" look like, and how successful might it be?

3. Methodology

3.1. Planning

The planning process for the *Pod-chraoladh sa Ghàidhlig* project took place during September 2011. In order to make efficient use of existing infrastructure, the decision was taken at an early stage to integrate the podcasting project as far as possible with the University of Glasgow's Gaelic Residency Scheme (*Sgeama Còmhnaidh nan Oileanach*), run by the University's Gaelic Language Officer, Fiona Dunn.

The Gaelic Residency Scheme is an innovative status/usage planning project which has been running at Glasgow since 2009, based on a model previously developed by universities in Ireland. The aim of the scheme is to bring together fluent Gaelic-speaking students (currently for those in years 2, 3 or 4 of an undergraduate degree) to live together in shared university accommodation ("the Gaelic flat"), where they are expected to use Gaelic with each other on a daily basis, and to act as an informal hub for other Gaelic-speaking students. Students who participate in the scheme are given a rent rebate of £1500 over the academic year, and in return are required to assist the Gaelic Language Officer in organising Gaelic-related events around the university.

The Gaelic Residency Scheme is open to any University of Glasgow student regardless of their discipline, providing they have a high degree of fluency in Gaelic. The project is funded by the Scottish Government, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, the Scottish Funding Council and the University of Glasgow.

Independently of the podcasting project, it had been decided that for the 2011-2012 academic year, the students on the Residency Scheme would be encouraged to develop a sustainable, Gaelic-medium social media presence for the project. For example, they would be encouraged to set up and maintain a website and blog, along with an integrated Twitter feed and Facebook presence. It was subsequently decided that the podcasting project would be integrated into the Residency Scheme social media strategy in some way, in order to take advantage of the relevant synergies and to allow for the potential sustainability of the podcasting project itself, beyond the 2011-2012 academic year.

A second element of the planning process involved liaising with the group from the Glasgow Gaelic Initiative (*Iomairt Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu*) who were responsible for coordinating the Gaelic contribution to Social Media Week Glasgow. This was a week-long event, running from 19-23 September 2011 in eight cities around the world, including Glasgow. The aim of Social Media Week was to explore the social, cultural and economic impact of social media, and help people and organizations connect through collaboration, learning and the sharing of ideas and information.³ Fiona Dunn was involved in planning the Gaelic contribution to Social Media Week, and in setting up and running the Twitter feed for this initiative. Other issues discussed were the potential of using podcasting and geocache-ing for Gaelic status and usage planning both in Glasgow and in the online world, and it was agreed to explore these activities for the next iteration in 2012.

³ <http://socialmediaweek.org/glasgow/>

3.2. Recruitment

The *Pod-chraoladh sa Ghàidhlig* project was launched to coincide with the start of the University of Glasgow academic year on 19 September 2011. In order to attract as many Gaelic-speaking students from across the university as possible to participate, we kicked off with a two-week viral marketing campaign, informing students about the project, and encouraging them to share the information with their Gaelic-speaking friends around the University. Three main channels of communication and social media were pursued:

- the Glasgow University Gaelic Initiative's email list of students and staff from across the university with an interest in Gaelic language and culture;
- various Glasgow University Facebook groups for people interested in Gaelic, e.g. An Comunn Oiseanach, Gàidhlig @ Oilthigh Ghlaschu;
- various Glasgow-based Twitter feeds for Gaelic interest groups, e.g. @GaelicGlasgow, @GaidhligOG, @IGGlaschu.

Particular attention was paid to marketing the project to students who were considering careers in Gaelic broadcasting or language development. Anyone interested in participating in the Gaelic podcasting project was encouraged to attend an initial recruitment workshop on the evening of 6 October 2011.

A total of 16 Gaelic-speaking students attended this initial workshop, mainly third and fourth year undergraduates from the Celtic and Gaelic department, including all four participants in the Gaelic Residency Scheme 2011-2012. The first hour was devoted to a presentation on podcasting and status planning. The following topics were covered during this presentation:

- the role of Soillse as national research network for maintenance and revitalisation of Gaelic language and culture, in particular its responsibility to promote and pursue *evidence-based* approaches to language development, and also to make Scotland the focus for world-leading, state-of-the-art solutions to the problems of maintaining linguistic and cultural diversity;
- language planning, in particular status/usage and acquisition planning, and the various roles and responsibilities of the Scottish Government, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and other Gaelic agencies;
- the history of the world wide web, from the "read-only" Web 1.0, to the participatory, interactive, "read-write" Web 2.0, covering some of the major topics and innovations such as sharing, user-generated content, social networking, and crowdsourcing;
- the technology and uses of podcasting, as one of the core applications of Web 2.0, in particular the distinction between podcasting and audio streaming, the use of syndication (RSS feeds) as a distribution mechanism, applications of podcasting for interactive media production, language learning, career development, and its potential for use as a tool in status and usage planning for minority languages.

The second hour of the initial workshop was devoted to a group discussion on some of the issues raised during the presentation.

The first topic under discussion involved the potential for using social media in general as a tool for Gaelic language development, in particular for status planning - the attempt to make Gaelic more visible and audible in the urban Glasgow environment, and to raise awareness of, sensitivity towards, and support for Gaelic among the non-Gaelic-speaking population. A number of possibilities were raised and discussed, including:

- the potential of "flashmobbing" as a status planning and awareness raising strategy. A flashmob is a group of people who use social media such as text messaging or Twitter to congregate, in an apparently uncoordinated manner, in the same place at the same time, engage in some highly salient group activity, and then gradually disperse. The flashmob is often recorded and uploaded to a video-sharing site such as Youtube afterwards. Ideas proposed included Gaelic-speakers flashmobbing various venues around Glasgow which are not normally associated with Gaelic culture in order to increase Gaelic awareness;
- using trending hashtags (i.e. keywords prefixed with #, denoting topics of current discussion on Twitter) on Twitter as a way of getting more Gaelic used in English-dominated online domains. The idea here would be to encourage Gaelic-medium Twitter users to pay close attention to the trending keywords on Twitter on any given day, and to make sure that Gaelic-medium tweets get included and promoted in the relevant feeds.

The second topic of discussion involved podcasting specifically, and especially how to achieve cross-branding between the podcasting project and the "Gaelic flat" brand. It was agreed that the Gaelic Residency Scheme provided a useful focus for the podcasting venture, since the notion of a Gaelic-speaking student residence in central Glasgow was a phenomenon of great interest to the wider Gaelic-speaking population in Glasgow, both student and professional. It was felt that it would be easier to get access to Gaelic-language professionals as representatives of the Gaelic Residency Scheme than as individual students. In addition, there was a clear opinion that the podcasting project could be used as useful promotion for the Gaelic Residency Scheme, and for the wider Glasgow University Gaelic Initiative as well, and that it would fit in nicely with the more general social media strategy being developed by the Residency Scheme students.

Finally, a decision was taken to divide into two separate, student-led groups to manage the creative element of the project:

- a podcasting group, which would be coordinated by the students in the Gaelic Residency Scheme, and which would focus on learning to make and publish podcasts.
- a more loosely coordinated "social media" group, which would be engaged in considering and realising other ways in which social media could be used to promote grassroots language planning for Gaelic.

Each group was to work independently of the staff responsible for the project to develop their ideas, but would report back at regular intervals. In addition, students were made aware of the budget made available by the Soillse Small Research Fund for the podcasting project, and encouraged to think about ways in which it might best be spent.

3.3. Podcasting training

3.3.1. Training preliminaries

Ten students signed up to be part of the podcasting group. We started by conducting an email survey of their motivations for participating in the project, their technical abilities, social media literacy, and prior awareness of podcasting. We also canvassed opinions on what the students considered to be their main training needs for successful participation in the project.

The most commonly cited reason for wanting to be part of the podcasting project was a desire to develop media skills (and a portfolio) for a possible future career in Gaelic broadcasting. On the other hand, two students were more interested in the language planning aspects of podcasting, and were aiming at careers in Gaelic language development (and language policy) in general, rather than broadcasting. All students were highly literate in social media, all beings avid users of either Facebook or Twitter (or both). One student had a lot of experience working in website production, and another had been a summer intern at Radio Nan Gàidheal. Two students had completed summer internships working for national Gaelic development bodies (Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Clì).

However, none of the students had any experience of producing and editing podcasts *per se*. One or two had a limited amount of experience of podcasting from the listener's perspective, but there was little awareness of how to subscribe to and download podcasts to mobile devices.

In order to facilitate communication within the podcasting group, the students set up a dedicated Facebook group to schedule events and discuss ideas. We also set up a private wiki to accompany the formal training process. All the students were invited to join the wiki and to use it to post interesting podcasting links they came across, and also to raise and discuss any technical problems they were experiencing.

3.3.2. Training sessions - technical aspects

The formal podcasting training was conducted by Colin Gray, of Edinburgh Napier University's Academic Development Unit and Wildtrails Media.⁴ Over the course of two, hand-on evening sessions, the following technical aspects of podcasting were covered:

- **What is a podcast?** Audio and video podcasts; distinction between podcasting and streaming audio; syndication via RSS feeds; content and copyright issues.
- **Using podcasts as a listener** - using a podcast directory (e.g. the iTunes store); using a "podcatcher" to subscribe to podcasts; listening to podcasts on a computer, MP3 player or smartphone.

⁴ <http://www.wildtrails.co.uk/>

- **What equipment do you need to create a podcast?** MP3 recorders, microphones, headphones, mobile phones, audio editing software (e.g. Audacity, Garageband).
- **Recording your podcast** - technical and acoustic/environmental factors to consider; scripted versus unscripted podcasts;
- **Editing your podcast** - locating royalty-free music, jingles and sound effects to use in your podcasts; importing and editing audio clips in Audacity; professional tips and tricks (e.g. mixing, fades, voiceovers).
- **Publishing your podcast** - hosting your podcasts on the web using Podbean; uploading individual podcast episodes; listing your podcast on a podcasting directory so others can find it and download it.

In the course of these sessions, students were assisted in recording their own audio on a range of mobile devices (MP3 recorders, laptops, iPods, smartphones and other mobile phones). They were also able to participate in editing the resulting audio files using Audacity.

3.3.3. Training sessions - professional aspects

After the technical training, the second element of the formal training programme that we organised for the podcasting project involved what can loosely be defined as professional aspects of podcasting for Gaelic. An evening session on this subject was developed and delivered by Jo MacDonald, former head of online Gaelic services at BBC Scotland, former interim chief executive of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and currently running the Gaelic development consultancy IUL.⁵ The following topics were covered during this session:

- **planning a podcast** - developing an idea, and then fleshing it out into a full podcast;
- **editorial choice** - selecting the best way to present a podcast to the audience (e.g. an interview, a monologue, a group conversation);
- **thinking about your audience** - how to develop interesting ideas from the perspective of the audience, and how to identify your potential audience in the first place;
- **permanence** - unlike radio shows, podcasts will be live on on the internet for ever. What implications does this have for content creation;
- **professionalism** - choice of topic, choice of linguistic register and vocabulary, branding and marketing.

In addition, we had asked Jo to listen to the initial podcasts produced by the students in advance of the session and provide detailed feedback on each one, based on the criteria she had selected as being the most relevant for Gaelic-medium podcasting.

⁵ <http://www.iul-alba.com/>

The main point of criticism was to do with issues of preparation and professionalism. Several of the initial podcasts had a very unformed flavour, generally involving an unmoderated group conversation on a particular topic, with very little in the way of advance planning aside from choice of a theme. It was felt that a more professional product could have resulted from even a small amount of preparation, planning and editing.

However, it was also pointed out that one of the main aims of the podcasting project is to create a wide range of different kinds of Gaelic audio for language learners to listen to, not just professional broadcasting. From this perspective, it might be useful to flag up in advance what kind of podcast is being aimed for in each case, and who exactly the audience is. It is clear that creating a podcast as part of a personal portfolio for a career in broadcast journalism is a very different activity to creating a podcast aimed at intermediate-level Gaelic learners trying to become attuned to rapidly spoken, informal Gaelic conversation.

One final critique involved issues of formal versus informal linguistic register. Students were encouraged to think more carefully about the variety of Gaelic used in the different podcasts they were making, and in particular about the grammatical and lexical aspects of this (e.g. codeswitching, which is often associated with more informal registers).

4. Evaluation

4.1. The *Taigh na Gàidhlig* brand

As mentioned above, one of the main contexts in which the *Pod-chraoladh sa Ghàidhlig* project was developed involved the University of Glasgow's Gaelic Residency Scheme, and in particular the new requirement upon participating students to create and maintain a social media strategy for the scheme, based around the concept of "the Gaelic flat". Although this wider activity is strictly speaking not a part of the podcasting project itself (being funded separately by the Glasgow University Gaelic Initiative, and supervised by the Gaelic Language Officer, Fiona Dunn), it is useful to summarise some of the achievements here, in order to understand how the podcasting element fits in to the overall strategy.⁶

First of all, the students in the Gaelic Residency Scheme made great progress in developing their social media identity, under the brand name "Taigh na Gàidhlig". They constructed a Gaelic-medium website (<http://www.taighnagaidhlig.org>), based around a group blog, implemented using the WordPress blogging software. They also created, and regularly updated, identities on the main social networking sites:

- On **Twitter**, the group created the @TaighNaGaidhlig feed, which is currently followed by 88 other Twitter users, and 43 tweets have been posted;
- On **Facebook**, a dedicated user account was created for the group (Taigh.Na.Gaidhlig). To date, this group has 195 "friends", and over 150 status updates have been posted.

In addition, the group designed an attractive logo for the brand, to be used across all the various web platforms:



⁶ The students participating in the Gaelic Residency Scheme 2011-2012 are Wojtek Dziejma, Aonghas MacLeòid, Màiri NicIllaChiar, and Coinneach Mac a' Ghobhainn.

4.2. The *Taigh Craolaidh* sub-brand

Furthermore, the students developed a subsidiary brand for the podcasting project itself, called "Taigh Craolaidh" (literally meaning "broadcasting house"), with its own webpage within the *Taigh na Gàidhlig* site. They also designed a distinct logo for the podcasting project, on the same basic theme as the other logo:



It was decided to use this brand to ensure that the podcasts created by the Gaelic Residency Students have a distinct identity from those of the podcasting project as a whole. In other words, the *Taigh Craolaidh* podcasts are to be seen as a subset of the entire podcasting project, thus allowing for a more straightforward relationship between the Residency Scheme and the podcasting initiative. All of the *Taigh Craolaidh* podcasts have been posted on the *Taigh na Gàidhlig* blog, and have been marketed on the Apple iTunes store podcast directory as a distinct RSS feed, using the custom-designed logo.

To provide server space for the podcasts themselves, we created a podbean.com account for the project. As well as providing sufficient internet storage space for all the podcasts developed during the podcasting project as a whole, it also provides for unlimited bandwidth for people downloading them (thus making it cheap to run), and an automatic RSS feed facility for people subscribing to the podcasts. It also allows for podcasts to be themed into different "channels". For example, the podbean.com page for the podcasting project as a whole is <http://taighcraolaidh.podbean.com>, but there is a dedicated channel (and RSS feed) for those produced by the Gaelic Residency Scheme students -

- <http://taighcraolaidh.podbean.com/category/taighnagaidhlig>

Both the *Taigh na Gàidhlig* website and the *Taigh Craolaidh* podcast channel were launched at an event on 12 January held by the Glasgow University Gaelic Initiative. The students in the Gaelic Residency Scheme gave a short presentation about their social media strategy in general, and the podcasting project in particular.

4.3. Taigh Craolaidh podcasts

To date, six podcasts have been recorded, edited and uploaded to the *Taigh Craolaidh* site, comprising almost 2 hours of Gaelic-medium audio.

- **A' chiad phod-chraoladh!** (21 Nov, 13 mins, 198 downloads to date) - a "kitchen-table" conversation between the residents of *Taigh na Gàidhlig* about the 180th anniversary dinner and ceilidh for the University of Glasgow's Ossianic Society. Completely unscripted, unmoderated and unedited, naturalistic conversation.
- **Agallamh le Fiona Dunn** (12 Jan, 22 mins, 243 downloads to date) - an interview between the residents of *Taigh na Gàidhlig* and Fiona Dunn, Gaelic Language Officer at the University of Glasgow, about the nature of her job, and her background. Preparation for this involved drafting a list of questions in advance, but no post-processing (e.g. editing, mixing) was attempted.
- **Celtic Connections tron mhicreofon againn** (10 Feb, 12 mins, 201 downloads to date) - During the Celtic Connections music festival, the residents of *Taigh na Gàidhlig* helped to organise a concert showcasing the best Gaelic musical talent at the University of Glasgow. This podcast resulted from recording made during the soundcheck for the concert, and at the after-show party. The content includes both musical performances and interviews with performers, and involved the first attempts at both editing multiple sound files into a single finished podcast, and mixing music with spoken audio.
- **Pod-chraoladh Latha Dhreuchdan 2012** (12 Feb, 24 mins, 140 downloads to date) - The residents of *Taigh na Gàidhlig* helped to organise a Gaelic careers day for students at the University of Glasgow, and they recorded interviews with representatives from Ùlpan, the Gaelic Books Council, BBC Scotland, and the Scottish National Archives. The resulting podcast involved a large amount of post-processing - editing, mixing in theme music and jingles, and adding a scripted introduction and conclusion.
- **Cùisean neo-eisimeileachd tro shùilean cèine** (25 Feb, 28 mins, 111 downloads to date) - This podcast was an (unedited) interview/discussion between Wojtek Dziema, a Polish resident of *Taigh na Gàidhlig*, and Calum MacLeòid, the president of Glasgow University Scottish Nationalist Association, on the subject of Scottish independence.
- **Coinneamh Bhliadhna a' Chomuinn** (17 March, 13 mins, 67 downloads to date) - The residents of *Taigh na Gàidhlig* interview the outgoing president of Glasgow University Ossianic Society, Shona Masson, about the society and what it does.

Audio has been recorded for three more *Taigh na Gàidhlig* podcasts, and the plan is to get these episodes online after the university exam period has finished. In addition, a student intern has been employed to assist the Gaelic Language Officer over the summer period 2012, and one of his duties will be to record a number of podcasts over the summer on the work of the Glasgow University Gaelic Initiative, to make sure the *Taigh Craolaidh* feed is being regularly updated and the audience retained.

4.4. Other podcasting activity

In addition to the *Taigh na Gàidhlig* podcasts discussed in the previous section, other students who were involved in the podcasting group have been engaged in a range of activities.

In particular, one of the participants is involved with the Glasgow University student internet radio network and has been presenting a weekly, Gaelic-medium music show.⁷ Since all of these radio shows were found to be easily "scrapable" from the radio website (in other words, it was easy to locate and download the source audio files after live transmission), and since the radio shows themselves were released under a no-rights-reserved license, it was decided to use these audio files as an available source of Gaelic spoken audio for students to develop skills in editing and publishing podcasts.

One problem was that, although the spoken interludes are non-copyrighted, the radio shows include licensed music, which cannot be used in a (downloadable) podcast for copyright reasons. Therefore, all the music had to be removed from the audio files prior to publishing them on the internet as podcasts, leaving just the introductions and interviews. Students practiced using the audio editing software Audacity and Garageband to edit the files in various ways, for example adding jungles and other sound effects, and experimenting with different methods of compilation. So far, five of the shows have appeared on the internet as suitably edited podcast episodes.

In addition, podcasting project participants have developed a number of ideas for podcast channels, for example:

- a *Taigh na Gàidhlig* "chat show" where figures from the Gaelic-speaking world are invited to the Gaelic flat to be interviewed about their work;
- a Gaelic baking show;
- an "out-and-about in Glasgow" music and social life podcast channel;
- a Gaelic "agony aunt" podcast, with problems solicited from the audience via Facebook;
- a regular podcast on the work of a local authority Gaelic Language Development Officer.

As yet none of these ideas have turned into finished podcast episodes, although in at least two cases, significant amounts of audio have been recorded. We are currently looking at ways of working around this bottleneck, and getting as much of the audio online as possible over the next few months.

⁷ <http://www.subcity.org/shows/musicwhateverhappens/>

4.5. Student feedback

After the training sessions had been concluded, we conducted an email survey of the participants asking them to evaluate their experiences in learning to podcast, and also in producing and publishing their own podcasts.

One of the main conclusions reported concerned the fact that the participants had found it much easier than expected to get up and running as amateur podcasters. Learning to use the recording devices, to transfer audio files to their computers, to perform basic editing functions, and then to upload the finished podcasts to the internet, took much less time and effort to get the hang of than many of the participants had thought would be the case in advance of the training sessions.

In particular, the students were impressed by the practical nature of the first training session, where they were shown how to make an entire podcast in 90 minutes, straight from the initial planning stage, through to getting it online and listed on a podcast directory. A number of them reported that this in itself had been the most confidence-boosting aspect of the project, and had made them immediately aware of the "empowering" nature of podcasting technology. In other words, once they realised how easy it was to get up and started, the motivation to develop podcast ideas and start recording was high.

However, on a negative note, most of the participants were concerned that it was proving much harder to achieve the kind of "professional-sounding" product that they were aiming for. Three points in particular were noted here:

- **planning and preparation issues** - the amount of time required to plan and prepare a more professional sounding podcast, as opposed to an informal conversation, was more than they had realised, at least at the start. Ad-libbing, and conducting interviews or performing monologues on the hoof was much more challenging than they thought it would be, and hence a lot of time had to be devoted to scripting out segments.
- **audio recording issues** - achieving a professional standard of audio recording was proving to be particularly difficult. Particular difficulties were encountered with distortion, feedback, popping and clipping, volume levels, echos and background noise. Although the podcast training had made them aware of these issues, it was proving hard to find solutions to them in the short term.
- **editing tips and tricks** - the students had picked up a couple of simple sound mixing tricks during the training sessions, but found that they were over-using these, and would like to have learned a wider-range of effects.

The students admitted to having learned enough about the process of planning, recording, editing and publishing podcasts to understand the value of podcasting to their professional development. Those who are considering a career in the Gaelic media felt that the project had given them a chance to experience something close to the full range of processes and challenges in creating a radio programme, and had proved to be really confidence-building. They also appreciated getting some in-depth feedback on both the content and technical issues in the podcasts they had created, and that this had made them think more deeply about the way they had gone about developing and recording their programme ideas.

Participants also felt that they had come a long way in developing their planning, collaboration and presentation skills in the course of making podcasts, and then reviewing them afterwards. The process of collaboratively developing podcast ideas and then recording them under broadcast conditions placed them under a different kind of pressure to what their university learning experience had made them accustomed to (mainly planning and writing essays in a non-collaborative environment). It was also noted that the experience of learning about a new topic and skill through the medium of a moderated, online, asynchronous wiki environment had proved to be a novel and rewarding experience, and very different to the ways that online learning environments were used in other courses they had done.

When asked about some of the other difficulties and challenges they had faced in the course of learning about podcasting and trying to make their own podcasts, the main theme that came up involved the problem of finding the time to do these things in the course of a normal academic year. The problem of juggling their official university work (coursework, essay and dissertation writing, and then preparing for exams), their paid work duties to support their studies, their involvement in other clubs and societies inside and outside the universities, and the podcasting project, meant that they were unable to devote nearly enough time to the last of these. In particular, towards the end of the academic year, up to and during the exam period, podcasting activity had ground to a complete halt, as other pressures took over completely. A couple of participants recommended that in future, things like the podcasting project be run outside of term-time altogether, when there were fewer distractions.

One final recommendation was that much greater thought be given to "incentivisation" in future iterations of this kind of project. A comparison was made with the FilmG Gaelic short film competition,⁸ which has somewhat similar aims and motivations to the podcasting project, but where the incentivisation aspect, in terms of gaining publicity and potentially winning a prize, is much more transparent.

When asked whether their experience learning about and making podcasts had made them likely to continue podcasting in future, all participants gave a positive response. It was felt that they hadn't had enough time over the course of the academic year to really explore the possibilities of podcasting, and were hoping to have more free time over the summer vacation to do so.

The participants were also asked to comment on what they thought about the value of podcasting for attempts to revitalise the Gaelic language, especially in terms of status planning and acquisition planning. The opinion was expressed that more and more people needed to be aware of how easy (and cheap) it is to undertake this kind of activity, since the more people who were aware of this, the more would try it out, and hence the greater the effect on the language. In particular, it was suggested that this kind of activity be made mainstream in Gaelic-medium secondary education, where students have more time and energy to devote to both extra-curricular and transferable-skills-oriented activity than they do in the context of a full-time undergraduate degree.

⁸ <http://filmg.co.uk>

4.6. Learner feedback

We also wanted to gain feedback from learners of Gaelic as to how useful these podcasts would be for them, in their attempts to acquire listening skills. With this in mind we identified two groups of students who we felt would benefit particularly from listening to the podcasts produced by the students:

- Second and third year Glasgow University undergraduates who either were taking or had taken the Gaelic 2A course. This course is aimed at second year ab initio students, and hence our group included people who had been studying Gaelic for between one and three years.
- Intermediate-level adult learners of Gaelic who participated in some of the online web forums and mailing lists dedicated to Gaelic learners.

The podcasts were publicised across the relevant Glasgow University course email lists and Gaelic-related society Facebook groups, and also on other non-University web forums, Facebook groups, Twitter feeds and email lists. Students and other learners of Gaelic were encouraged to download them for educational purposes, and then to provide feedback (by email) as to how beneficial they found this kind of resource. Feedback was received from seven University of Glasgow students, and fifteen adult online learners.

On the positive side, Gaelic learners appears to be impressed by the idea of having access to a large amount of naturalistic, conversational Gaelic that they could listen to over and over again, to try and work out exactly what is being said. In particular, it was felt that having the ability to download the podcast episodes to their computers, and then to transfer them to their iPods, MP3 players, smartphones and tablets was a particular benefit. It was pointed out several times that the most popular Gaelic listening resources did not usually permit offline, mobile listening in this way, for example BBC iPlayer shows from *Radio nan Gàidheal* or from BBC Alba, the *Guthan nan Eilean* YouTube videos,⁹ or the *Tobar an Dualchais* recordings archive.¹⁰

The learners who responded to the request for feedback also were pleased at the diversity found in the students podcasts, in terms of topic, conversation setting (e.g. formal interviews, informal conversations, scripted and unscripted monologues, etc.), regional dialect/accent, and gender. The focus on young people, in terms of topics that young people are interested in, and the contemporary, colloquial styles of speech found among young people, was also found to be useful, compared to the majority of other listening materials available to learners.

⁹ <http://guthan.wordpress.com/>

¹⁰ <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/>

The only criticism to come out of the request for feedback from learners concerned the often poor sound quality found in the podcast recordings. In particular:

- Learners found the volume levels were often too low to be able to follow what was being said, especially in situations when there was any level of background noise (e.g. on a train, or while driving or walking in the streets). It was recommended that podcasters pay more attention to this before putting the podcasts online, making sure that volume levels are amplified as much as possible without "clipping" high amplitudes.
- In other cases, the volume levels were fine but the recording contained a lot of "clipping", where distortion is caused by high amplitude sounds in speech (typically sibilant sounds). Learners reported that the discomfort caused by frequent clipping in the recordings made them incapable of concentrating on what was being said.
- Although the podcasters had attempted to experiment with various sound effects in editing the podcasts (mixing music and speech, fade-ins and fade-outs), these were felt to be distracting and superfluous by learners, especially when the sound levels were not set at the correct volumes to allow the speech to be understood clearly. Learners reported hearing a number of transitions between segments where the master volume level shifted suddenly and significantly.

Sound quality issues aside, the feedback from Gaelic learners was wholly positive. The general consensus was that a large archive of diverse podcasts would be an invaluable resource for adults learning to understand Gaelic at the intermediate to advanced level, especially if this archive was freely available to download and reuse without licensing concerns. It was pointed out by a couple of learners that it is much harder to find suitable audio resources for Gaelic than it is for other languages they had learned or were learning

It was recommended that the podcasts would be even more useful for acquisition planning purposes if reliable, gold standard transcriptions were made available for each one. To this end, in the next stage of the project we will be setting up an open wiki to allow Gaelic learners to collaborate on creating such a transcription (via crowdsourcing). This would allow a kind of "cascaded" learning to take place, where successive generations of learners would be able to assist their followers, by creating incrementally more accurate transcriptions of the podcasts.

5. Other social media activity

As mentioned above, the podcasting activity was only one of the ways in which the original group of students had planned to use crowdsourcing and social media to assist with status and acquisition planning for Gaelic. In particular, a second group of students had decided to experiment with other ways in which social media could be used to promote grassroots language planning for Gaelic.

By the start of December 2011, a couple of students had developed an idea for using social media, viral marketing, and social networking software to promote acquisition planning for Gaelic. The main thrust of the proposal was to attempt to attract and motivate those people who make a "New Year's resolution" to learn Gaelic. From anecdotal evidence, it appears that many people make such a resolution at the start of the year, but the vast majority tend to drop out after a month or so. It is also known that the pedagogical drop-out rate in most kinds of learning experience can be reduced significantly by using a group-based, collaborative learning environment, where the periodical deficits in the self-motivation of individual learners can be compensated for by the group as a whole. With this in mind, it was decided in the first instance to focus on the task of attracting the attention of the diverse group of people who are interested in learning Gaelic, and encouraging as many of them as possible to join an existing online Gaelic learners' community.

Although this social media, viral marketing project is strictly speaking a spin-off of the Pod-chraoladh sa Ghàidhlig project, rather than an intrinsic part, we will present some of the methodology and results here. At a later date, an evaluation will be conducted into the main hypothesis of this sub-project - that if enough would-be Gaelic learners are brought together at the start of the calendar year and encouraged to join an online community, then the enhanced "social" nature of the learning experience may result in a larger proportion of them maintaining their interest and activity throughout the year.

5.1. Creation of a video mash-up clip

As far as the viral marketing is concerned, the students had three weeks to get as many would-be Gaelic learners to sign up to learn Gaelic in 2012, before the start date of 1 January 2012. They decided to try and create a YouTube video as a marketing tool for the project, and to try and get this video to "go viral" as far as they could. The final frame of this video would be a link to the project homepage,¹¹ where further instructions would be found about how to register interest in learning Gaelic.

We helped the students develop, create and publish a short YouTube video. The technique chosen was a "mash-up", where we took an existing video which had been shared on YouTube under a Creative Commons license, and simply added subtitles to it for comic

¹¹ <http://www.gaelic2012.org>

effect. This mash-up technique is one of the most common kinds of viral video found on the web - the most famous examples are probably the Hitler-Downfall-rant parodies.¹²

It was decided to use the basic theme of "pandas" for the video clip, for two main reasons. On the one hand, this topic was felt to be particularly timely in the Scottish context, since a pair of pandas had just arrived at Edinburgh zoo from China, sparking off a week-long bout of social media "panda-mania". On the other hand, the students thought that making the link between "endangered species" and "endangered languages" (alternatively between biodiversity and linguistic diversity) would provide a fruitful area for irony.

The video clip was produced using the Apple iMovie software package. Once the basic idea had been established and the source video located, creation of the subtitled parody itself only took around half a day's work. The video was uploaded to YouTube, ready to be shared around the internet.¹³

5.2. Sharing the video clip

The YouTube video was uploaded on 11 December 2011, and links to it were posted on appropriate Facebook groups and Twitter feeds, along with an exhortation to people to "share" the video as widely as possible, to try and get the attention of as many would-be Gaelic learners as they could.

Viewing figures over the next four weeks were as follows:

11-17 Dec	18-24 Dec	25-31 Dec	1-7 Jan
368	294	87	133

In total, the video clip was viewed 882 times over the four-week period. According to the statistics collected by YouTube, the clip was viewed from 27 different countries, the top five being as follows:

United Kingdom	718
United States	44
Canada	30
Ireland	22
Australia	15

¹² [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Downfall_\(film\)#Parodies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Downfall_(film)#Parodies)

¹³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ez2EmAX3faE>

With respect to gender, 55% of (logged-in) viewers were male, and 45% female. The age distribution was as follows:

13-17	18-24	24-35	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
1.3%	3.7%	3.7%	34.0%	19.3%	36.2%	1.9%

It is interesting that, although the group of people who initially shared the video clip were all in the 18-35 age group, the vast majority of people who ended up viewing it were significantly older, in the 35-64 age group.

5.3. "Click-through" statistics

As mentioned above, the viral video clip ended with an invitation to visit the project website if they were interested in learning Gaelic in 2012. Those who were motivated to visit the website were presented with an information page about learning Gaelic, and asked to register their interest by submitting their email address to get more information.

According to Google Analytics, the 882 views of the YouTube clip resulted in 707 **unique visitors** to the project website. These statistics allow us to build up a good geographical picture of the kinds of people who appear to be interested in learning Gaelic.

The 962 total visits to the site were from 31 different countries, the top six being as follows:

United Kingdom	611
United States	112
Canada	89
Ireland	41
Italy	27
Germany	16
Australia	13

Of the 611 visits from within the UK, 418 came from Scotland, distributed geographically as follows:

Glasgow	137
Edinburgh	135
Aberdeen	68
Inverness	10
Boness	9
Clydebank	9
Cumbernauld	9
Perth	9
other central belt	25
Stornoway	3

Finally of the 707 unique visitors to the project website, 180 filled out the form to submit their email address to the mailing list, to register their interest in learning Gaelic. As well as submitting their email address, these people were asked to state where they had heard about the project, with the following results:

Facebook	43%
Twitter	14%
YouTube	3%
word of mouth	11%
other	33%

Among the "other" sources mentioned were:

Atlantic Gaelic Academy	8
www.gurnnurn.com	8
Fòram na Gàidhlig	7
Ùlpan	6
Tumblr	6
Google	5
NewsNet Scotland	4
Iomairtean Gàidhlig	3

5.4. Next steps

On 1 January 2012, the 180 people who had said they were interested in learning Gaelic were contacted by email and encouraged to register for an existing online Gaelic learners community, where a dedicated sub-community had been set up for brand-new learners to participate in.¹⁴ Of these, 110 people signed up to become members of the community, within the first two weeks of January 2012.

In conclusion, in the space of four weeks in December 2012, and for a total outlay of £15 (the cost of registering the gaelic2012.org URL), the social media group participants were able to use basic viral marketing techniques to create an email list of almost 200 people from around the world who are interested in learning Gaelic and get more than half of them signed up to a collaborative learning community. Two of the participants went on to create other Gaelic video clips for submission to the FilmG competition in 2012. In addition, another Gaelic organisation (Deiseal Ltd, the creators of the Ùlpan adult learning scheme) was inspired to experiment with viral marketing in order to promote acquisition planning.¹⁵

¹⁴ <http://www.foramnagaidhlig.net>

¹⁵ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPAesliVFVA>