

February 2026

IRIS DO LUCHD-IONNSACHAIDH

Zine for Gaelic learners



A collaborative magazine celebrating
our shared love of the Gaelic language

Welcome to our Gaelic Learners' Magazine

This magazine is a celebration of the Gaelic language and the vibrant community of learners and speakers around the world. It brings together voices from Gaelic conversation circles, sharing personal stories, reflections, and creative contributions that show the many ways Gaelic enriches our lives.

Inside, you'll find:

- Personal journeys – Why people learn Gaelic and what inspires them.
- Creative writing – Stories, sayings, and different views.
- Global connections – Postcards and messages from contributors worldwide.

Our hope is that this magazine will inspire, connect, and encourage everyone on their Gaelic journey, whether you're a learner, fluent speaker or anything in-between. Together, we keep the language alive.

Tapadh leibh gu mòr dhan fheadhainn a bha airson pàirt a ghabhail sa phròiseact agus airson ur gaol air a' Ghàidhlig a roinn!

This zine has been designed and produced by environmental charity Keep Scotland Beautiful and supports its Our Heritage, Our Future project, continuing its efforts to promote the Gaelic language as a core element of our cultural heritage in Scotland.

The project is a partnership between the University of Edinburgh and Keep Scotland Beautiful, funded with support from Historic Environment Scotland and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, with thanks to players of the National Lottery.



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH



Jonathan Angell

My name is Jonathan. I'm originally from Ullapool and I live in Glasgow with my partner, who is from Hong Kong. I have a Master's degree from the University of Edinburgh in Education with Gaelic. I work as the Gaelic Education and Learning Officer at Keep Scotland Beautiful, where I'm helping to support Scotland's heritage by keeping the Gaelic language alive and introducing it to new audiences. I'm also the Chair of the board of trustees at An Lòchran, the Gaelic centre in Glasgow. When I'm not involved with these groups, I'm learning Cantonese, going for walks, reading books, and using Gaelic wherever possible.



Gaelic in Jonathan's life

Gaelic is important to me because of the perspective it gives me. I've noticed that we're all just making sounds. Do you remember a time when you said "tìoraidh" or "bye" in another language? Au revoir, adíos, 再見 (zoi3 gin3) – maybe because it sounds cool and stylish. Well, think about a different perspective, a new interpretation, by continuing with that language. After all, we're just making sounds – so why aren't we willing to learn other sounds that give us the chance to play with perspectives, understanding and art?



Nature

When I'm outdoors, I think about how important nature is to us. It's not just something nice, it's part of our health and wellbeing, and therefore our body. Gaelic invites us to look at nature in a different way. With place names coming from trees, waters, animals, that connection is there, and it's clear how close Gaels were to the land.

When we create green spaces today – in a park, beside a school, or even in a small garden – we're doing more than planting flowers. It's an opportunity for people to learn Gaelic words through nature: darach (oak), seileach (willow), seillean (bee). That gives us a chance to connect with our culture and language and with the past.

For me, places like these are spaces of rest and inspiration. They remind us that Gaelic isn't just about words – it's about how we see the world.

Celebrate nature, culture, and the Gaelic language.

Andy Beck

My name's Andy Beck, I'm originally from the south of England, and I now live in Drumsagard Village on the outskirts of Glasgow. I'm married to Kerstin, who is originally from Germany, and whom I met whilst living in Berlin. I'm fortunate enough to be working in Gaelic at present, courtesy of my job as a translator. I'm also involved as a volunteer at An Lòchran, a Gaelic charity based in Partick that runs different Gaelic events for the people of Glasgow (and beyond!).



Gaelic in Andy's life

I'm interested in a number of world languages. However, Gaelic is also important to me as it's a minority language, and there's every chance it could continue to wither if we don't make the effort to save it. Although this is no easy task, with differing opinions on the most effective ways of doing so, every individual who has an interest in the Gaelic language must do their best.

In my view, other people should learn Gaelic if they're interested in Scottish culture. And Gaelic is a beautiful language, surrounded by a rich repository of culture.



Andy's favourite learning method

There are many ways to learn a language. However, one learning method stands out – for me, at least – as more effective than the rest.

In the Gaelic world, we have a plethora of recorded material – from the latest shows on CBeebies to more traditional content such as *Bonn Còmhraidh* or *Kist o' Riches*. Among this content, I find a recording that's challenging, a recording I can't fully understand to begin with. These recordings are usually five to ten minutes long.

Once I've found one, I listen to the same recording again and again – say, two or three times a day. Slowly but surely, I get used to it and I'll understand more and more of it. After a week or so, I'll understand [almost] everything. This is a fantastic exercise for improving your listening (and speaking!) skills.

This method of learning is based on a kind of “immersion”, as it involves listening and nothing else. You pick up the language naturally, in the same way a child would from its mother.

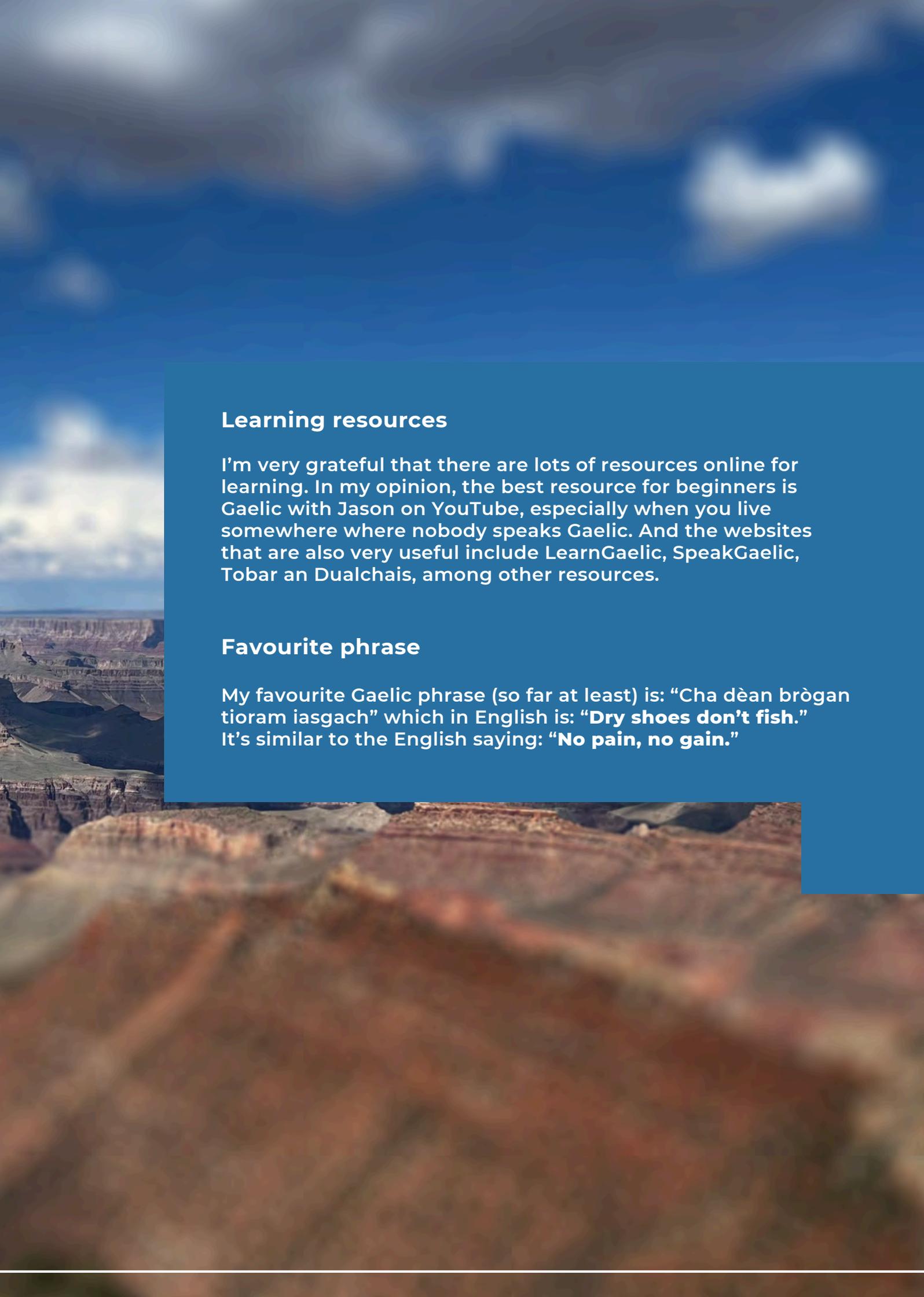
Dylan Elmore

My name is Dylan. I'm from the United States. I've been learning Gaelic for two years now. I found out about the language while I was reading a book on Celtic history. I'm very interested in it because I have Scottish ancestors. So, I decided to learn Gaelic, and I've been reading or listening to the language every day since I first discovered it.



Gaelic in Dylan's life

Gaelic is important to me mainly because it's really interesting and fun. Also, I feel a stronger connection with my ancestors and history. Another thing is that I'm very happy to be one of the people keeping Gaelic alive.



Learning resources

I'm very grateful that there are lots of resources online for learning. In my opinion, the best resource for beginners is Gaelic with Jason on YouTube, especially when you live somewhere where nobody speaks Gaelic. And the websites that are also very useful include LearnGaelic, SpeakGaelic, Tobar an Dualchais, among other resources.

Favourite phrase

My favourite Gaelic phrase (so far at least) is: “Cha dèan brògan tioram iasgach” which in English is: “**Dry shoes don't fish.**” It's similar to the English saying: “**No pain, no gain.**”

Robyn Ireland

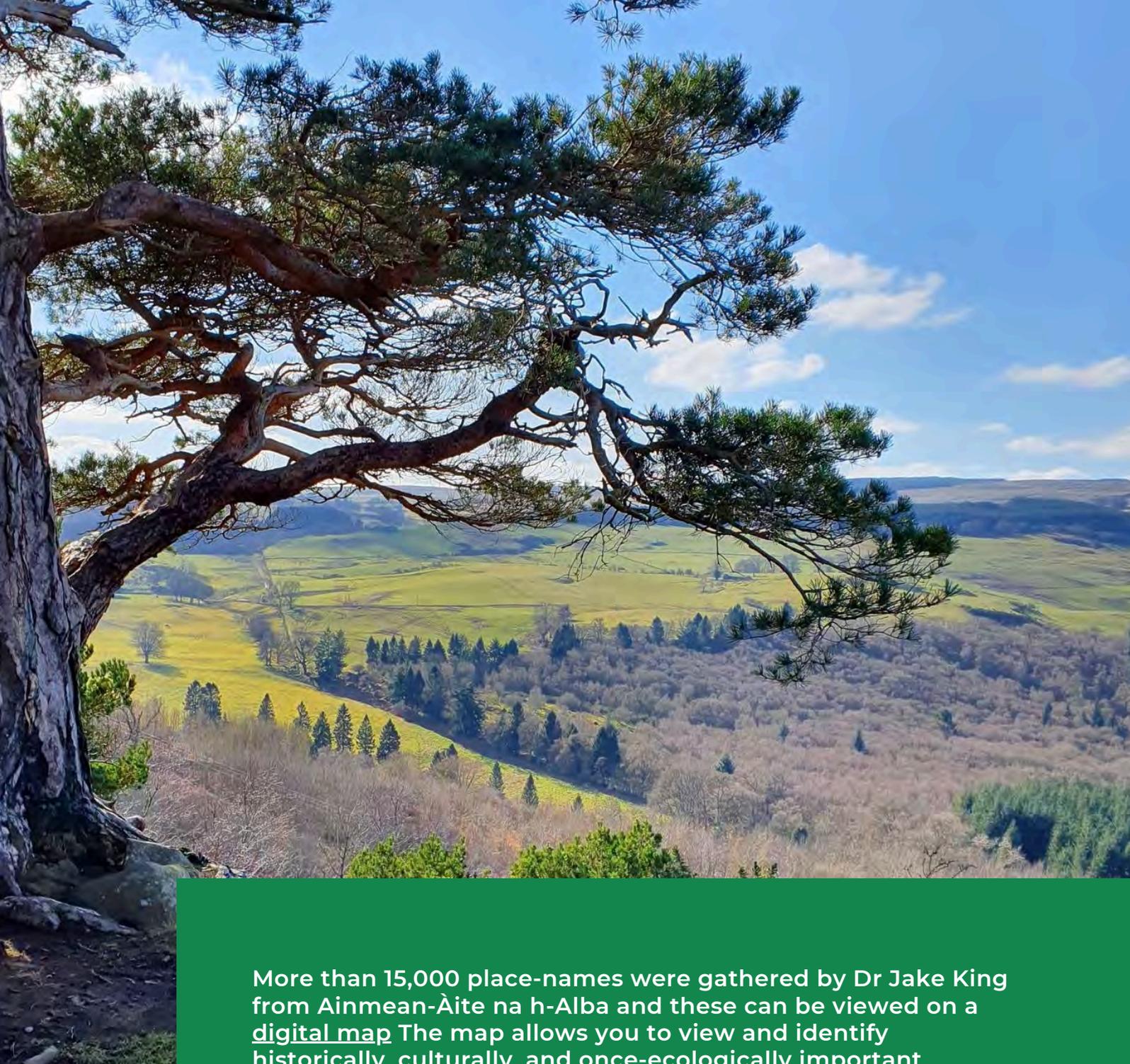
I'm Robyn Ireland and I work as a Gaelic Officer at NatureScot, Scotland's nature agency. As part of my role, I deliver our Gaelic Language Plan and work on a range of projects that strengthen the links between our nature and people through the language and its culture.



Can linguistic clues enhance our understanding of an area's past and inspire its future potential?

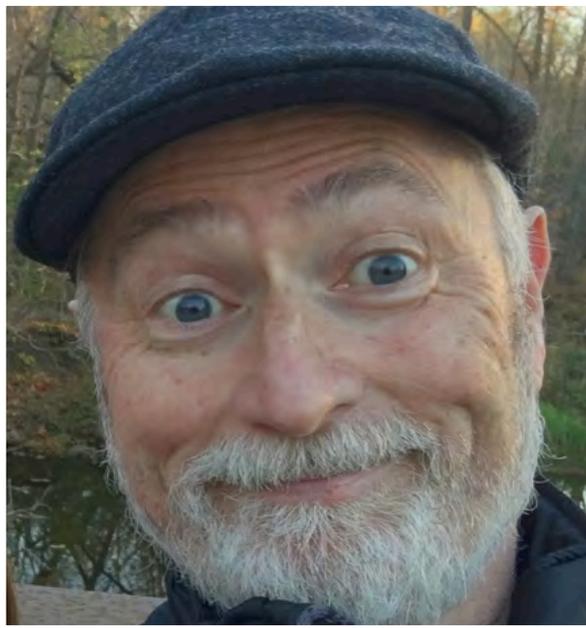
Coilltean Cailte (Forgotten Woodlands) is a project that has mapped Scottish placenames that suggest the presence of woodland.

Much of Scotland used to be covered in forest. Today, native woodland covers just 4% of the total land area. Place-names shine a light on the strength of connection between Scotland's natural and cultural diversity.



More than 15,000 place-names were gathered by Dr Jake King from Ainmean-Àite na h-Alba and these can be viewed on a [digital map](#) The map allows you to view and identify historically, culturally, and once-ecologically important woodland sites. Some of the areas are still wooded, but of special interest are the areas of open ground with no records of previous land use beyond the linguistic clues left. The extensive research focuses on Gaelic, though names from Scots, English, Old Norse and British are also included.

We hope that this will inspire landowners and communities to think of the native trees their land used to support and consider how they might wish to restore its ecological value for the future.



Paul McCormack

I am Paul, and I have been a Gaelic learner for a few years. I am still very much at the beginning. I didn't start learning Gaelic properly until after I retired. Now, I am a student at the Gaelic College in Nova Scotia, studying remotely. I love history, especially Scottish and Canadian history, languages, and photography. I live in Canada, near Toronto.



Gaelic in Paul's life

Gaelic is important to me because it is a link to our past. Without a doubt, language is useful for understanding history in the context of other events. I am sure that understanding the language is important for understanding the mindset of people from that country. When you learn another language, any language, it is good for your mental health. And I think Gaelic is quite fun!



Gaelic in Canada

Gaelic heritage in Canada is large and long-standing, from early immigrants who arrived on the shores of Nova Scotia on ships like the *Eachann* in 1637, through Loyalists after the American War of Independence (1775–1783), and beyond.

Although the Highland and Irish famine and the Second Clearances in the mid-19th century were devastating for Scotland, they gave opportunities to Highland and Lowland people to settle in places like Canada, the United States, and Australia, though the people themselves didn't have much choice. In fact, at that time Gaelic was the third most common European language in Canada, after English and French. The Canadian census of 1851 reported that the number of Gaels in Canada grew from about 42,000 to about 75,800 between 1848 and 1851. This number represented around two and a half percent of Scotland's population at that time.

There are many Scottish place-names across the country. Most Gaels settled in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island but more went to Red River County in Manitoba or to the hills of Alberta. And more Gaelic speakers went to Ontario, in Bruce County and Glengarry County.

Today, there are many community groups supporting their Gaelic heritage across the country, such as the Gaelic Society of Toronto, founded in 1880, and other groups throughout Canada, from Vancouver in the west to the largest Gaelic community in the country in Cape Breton in the east.

Yuki Miyagi

I'm Yuki, I'm from Japan, and I've lived in Scotland for 30 years. I came to Scotland as a student in St Andrews. When I came here, I didn't know of Gaelic although I knew other things in the Highlands – whisky, kilt, bagpipes, Loch Ness, Glencoe etc. I still remember it was on TV when I heard it for the first time. I'm sure it was BBC Alba, and I became curious about the language then.



Gaelic in Yuki's life

Gaelic is a particularly important part of Scotland's heritage. It gives me a kind of sense of belonging to the country. But I'm really interested in the language itself. I don't have any complicated reason. I'm just happy that I have a bit of Gaelic now. I can understand a good bit of what people are saying on BBC Alba. Isn't that nice!! I'm also happy that I'm among the people who are keeping the language alive, and I'm happy I'm taking part in the Gaelic community.



Writing a diary

There's something I have been doing every day since I started to learn Gaelic. And it's writing a diary. I've learned different languages before, and that's what I was doing when I was learning them. It doesn't matter if your sentence is simple, or if you make a mistake. It's important that you'll get used to making a sentence quickly. It helped me with learning any language. If you want to try it, start today!

Gaelic community

There is something else I'm really happy about since I started to learn Gaelic. It's being in the Gaelic community. If I didn't start Gaelic, I hadn't met all these people, who are in different parts of Scotland or UK, or abroad in the US, Canada, Australia, etc. It's really nice we are building it together, and I hope it'll keep growing larger. I'm lucky there is a local Gaelic group in my area, and I hope it'll grow stronger too.



Jennifer Moffat

My name is Jennifer and I live in Montrose. I was born and raised in Aberdeen. I am married and have two sons and two grandchildren. I used to be an accountant. I am interested in football and golf. I like walking on the beach every day. Eriskay is my favourite place in Scotland.



Gaelic in Jennifer's life

Gaelic is very important in my life even though my family doesn't speak Gaelic. I am from Scotland and I really like living here. Gaelic has been spoken in Scotland for hundreds of years. I am happy to help keep the language alive. I am proud that I speak Gaelic even though I'm not fluent yet. We don't want to lose the language, so it's important that people learn Gaelic. The classes are fun and I have met lots of nice people. They always encourage me with the language.

Eriskay and Father Allan

Eriskay is a small island in the Outer Hebrides, lying between South Uist and Barra. Allan MacDonald came to Eriskay in 1894. He was a priest. The people of the island called him Maighstir Ailein. He was an exceptional man.

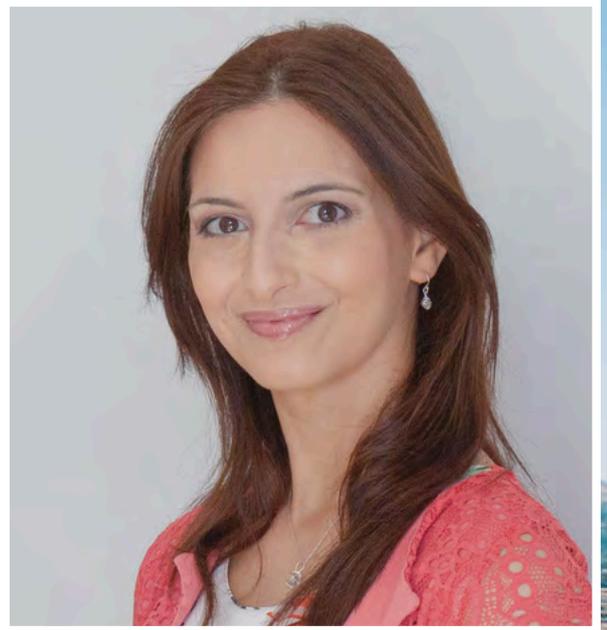
He worked very hard for the people of Eriskay. A new church was built with his help, and he encouraged education and the culture of the Gaelic language. He had a deep interest in Gaelic, especially in storytelling traditions and lexicography. Although he was not raised as a Gaelic speaker, he learned the language until he became fluent.

He began collecting oral tradition in 1886 – songs, stories and expressions from South Uist and Eriskay. He wrote down words and sayings that did not appear in the dictionary compiled by Eòghann MacEachainn. His collection is extremely important. Without his writings, this knowledge would have been lost forever.

He died in 1905, and he lies in the cemetery on Eriskay by the sea, among the people he served. Eriskay was the place he loved most, and where he was loved by the community. He wrote many poems and hymns in Gaelic. My favourite of them is “Eilean na h-Òige”.

Natalie Naudi

My name is Natalie and I'm from Malta. I started learning Gaelic five and a half years ago, during the pandemic. I read about the Gaelic course on Duolingo. I didn't know anything about Gaelic at the time, but I was in love with the language within a month. Since then, I've used various resources such as SpeakGaelic.scot, Beag air Bheag, An Litir Bheag, language course at the Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and so on. I follow Radio nan Gàidheal and BBC Alba as often as I can to improve my Gaelic.



Gaelic in Natalie's life

I found something special in Gaelic... It's a beautiful, musical language, and I never thought I'd be learning a new language as an adult. My days are now full of things connected with Scotland.

People should learn Gaelic because it's a unique language: full of meaningful expressions and shaped by the landscape of Scotland. It's good to understand how our ancestors lived, through their customs and heritage. And as they say, A land without a language is a land without a soul, and Gaelic is the language of the Gaels.



The impact of Scottish culture in the life of Natalie

I love music, and Scottish music really appeals to me. I'm very fond of Gaelic songs, especially waulking songs and port à beul. It's wonderful to learn new words through songs. In addition, I followed online singing courses too, where I met lovely people and learned new songs.

I'm also extremely fond of step dancing, and I'm grateful to Gaelic for giving me the opportunity to take online courses. Singing, dancing and listening to Scottish music really lifts my spirits.

Recently, I was doing research about traditional bagpipe notation. I thought it would be wonderful to sing a song in that style. I read that the practice chanter is an instrument in its own right, and so I bought one. I've been learning the pipes for two years now, and I'm improving little by little: where there's a will, there's a way.

One thing leads to another, and I'm so grateful that I took that first lesson in May 2020. Moreover, through this language I've encountered a friendly and supportive community. Everyone is so kind and considerate, and that gives me confidence.



Deanna Nicholson

I've been learning Gaelic for five years. At first, I was interested in the words of Gaelic songs, but as I learned more, I realised I have a deep interest in Gaelic culture and history. I completed the Advanced Course at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig last summer, and now I'm working on reading and speaking Gaelic with online groups.



Gaelic in Deanna's life

I started learning Gaelic during lockdown. I found lots of friends with similar interests, and I enjoyed the challenge. I didn't understand English grammar at the time, and I had no idea what "the article" meant!

Now I write better in English, and my memory has improved too. Gaelic is an important part of Scotland's history and its future, and the more people who learn it, the stronger it will survive.



On the Beach (translated from Gaelic)

I'm walking on the beach in South Uist. The wind is all around me, and I hear the sound of the sea. I hear the birds chirping. I'm walking with my friends. We're talking about anything and everything.

I feel calm, happy, and safe.

I open my eyes and see the top of the MRI machine close to my nose. The space is so small, and my breathing is getting faster. I know I'll be in this tiny space for another ten minutes.

I need good thoughts to escape this place. I try harder to think.

Suddenly, I hear the sound of the sea.

The birds are chirping again.

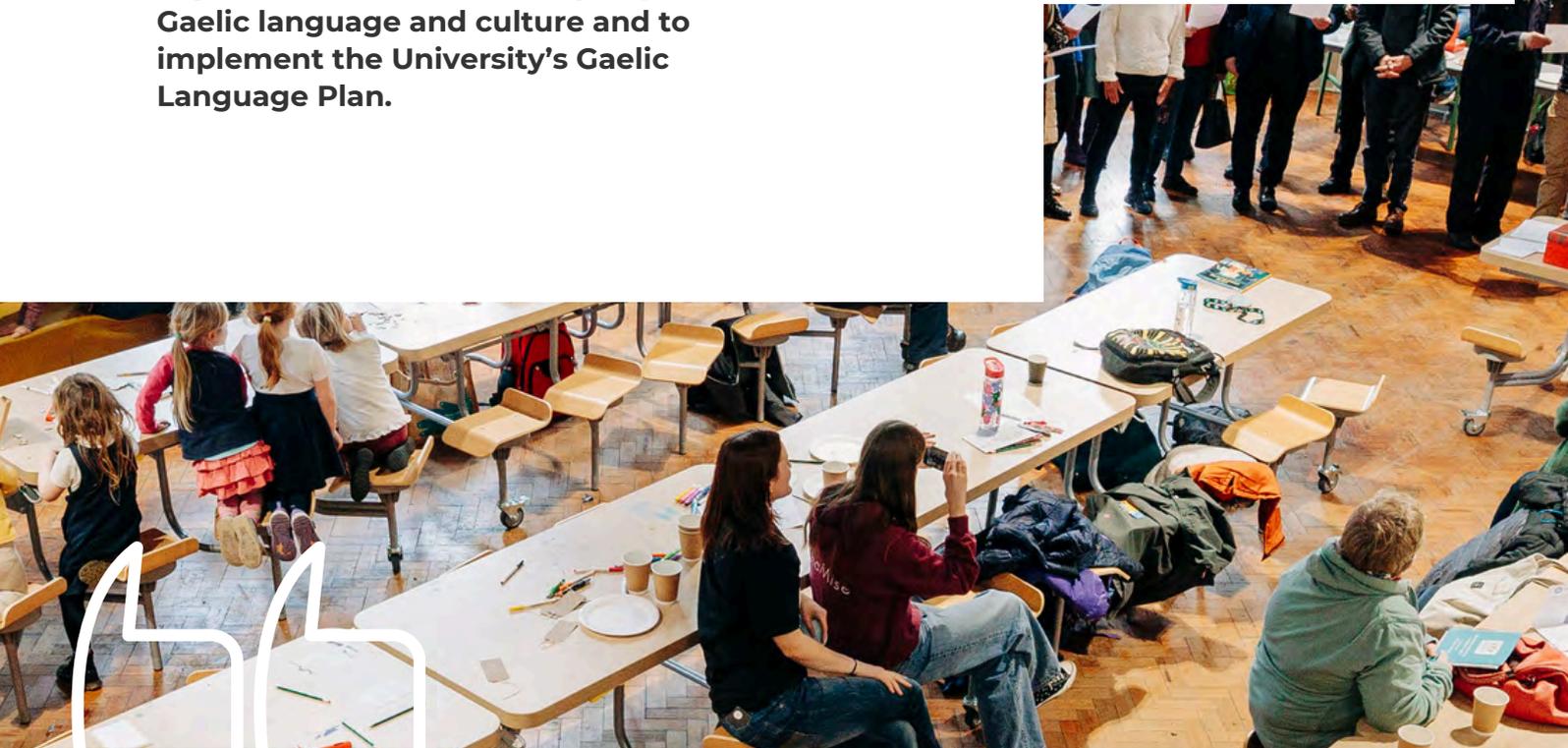
I'm walking on the beach in South Uist with my friends.

I feel calm, happy, and safe.

My safe place is on the beach in South Uist. I go there whenever I need peace.

Isla Parker

My name is Isla and I am from Dumfries and Galloway originally, but I have been living in Glasgow for eight years now. I am the Gaelic and Community Relations Officer at the University of Edinburgh. In my role, I work with University staff and organisations across the city to promote Gaelic language and culture and to implement the University's Gaelic Language Plan.



Gaelic and the University of Edinburgh

Gaelic has long been an important part of the University of Edinburgh's history. It was at the University of Edinburgh that the first Chair of Celtic in Scotland was established in 1882, and the Highland Society is the oldest student society at the University.



Image credit: Isla Parker



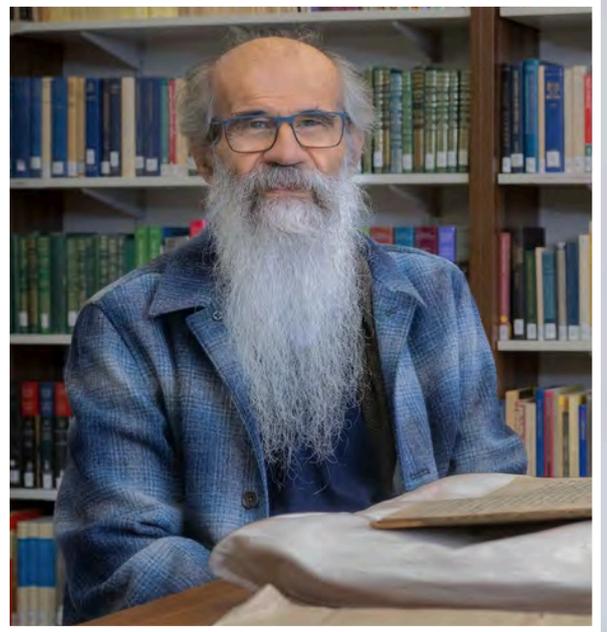
Image credit: Isla Parker

However, the story of Gaelic at the University is not just about the past! Recently, researchers at the University have been working in collaboration with the University of Glasgow, UHI and BBC Alba, with funding from the Scottish Government, to develop speech-to-text tools for Gaelic. To do so, the team are using text and audio sources from the School of Scottish Studies' Archives at the University of Edinburgh and the Digital Archive of Scottish Gaelic (DASG) at the University of Glasgow. Those with Gaelic can support the project by helping to transcribe audio recordings on the Opening the Well website.

Research such as this is very important in providing a foothold for Gaelic in the digital age, and, for me, it is great that the wider community are able to take part as well.

Kyriakos Kalorkoti

I was born and raised in Cyprus, but I have lived in Scotland for most of my life. I was a lecturer at the University of Edinburgh in Informatics until I retired four and a half years ago.



Gaelic in Kyriakos's life

I have a great interest in the Highlands and Gaelic poetry. It is important that humanity does not lose any language; Gaelic has been under attack for a long time. We should make every effort to keep it alive and healthy.



Haikus (translation by Jonathan Angell)

“

Haiku 1

Reflect on your life
from December to quiet Fall
what made it worthwhile?

”

“

Haiku 2

Vowels without count,
but some with the right total -
an end comes at once.

”

“

Haiku 3a

Is this a haiku,
or maybe just a wee dog,
or pure foolishness?

”

“

Haiku 3b

Is this a haiku,
or a dog in a house instead,
or nothing at all!

”

“

Haiku 4

Put slender with slender
and broad with broad together
so you won't go wrong!

”

“

Haiku 5

English is strange,
they say 'let them unite',
in Gaelic: 'lenite!'

”

“

Haiku 6

Great frozen sorrow,
enduring without pity,
without tears, a mute,
eternal tune.

”

“

Haiku 7

The end of the haiku
comes quickly and without
delay, a promise fulfilled

”

Conclusion

We hope this magazine has inspired you on your Gaelic learning journey and helped you feel connected to the wider community of speakers and learners. Whether you are just beginning or already fluent, every word, every story, and every conversation matters. They all contribute to the vibrancy and richness of Gaelic. Together, we keep the language alive, sharing our love for it, our culture, and our heritage with the world. Thank you for reading, and cherish the stories that bring life to the connections we all share.

With very best wishes,
Jonathan (Keep Scotland Beautiful) and Isla (University of Edinburgh)



We support the Sustainable Development Goals.

Keep Scotland Beautiful is your charity for our environment. We work with you to help combat climate change, reduce litter and waste, restore nature and biodiversity and improve places.

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