

Irish parents and Gaelic- medium education in Scotland

A Report for Soillse

2015

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SOILLSE

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References

1. Introduction

This research project investigated the experiences and views of Irish parents who have chosen to place their children in Gaelic-medium education (GME) in schools in the Central Belt of Scotland, specifically in Edinburgh and Glasgow. Gaelic schools and units in these urban areas are attracting an increasingly diverse group of parents, within which parents from Ireland form a prominent and important element. The research involved conducting a series of qualitative in-depth interviews with a sample of Irish parents who are currently sending their children to Gaelic-medium schools in Edinburgh or Glasgow. In the interviews these Irish parents provided narrative reflections on their motivations for placing their children in GME, on their perceptions of the Gaelic language and the Gaelic language community in Scotland and their efforts to learn Gaelic themselves. We also investigated their relationship with the Irish language, including their general attitudes, their previous experience (especially in the course of their own schooling) and their sociolinguistic practices in relation to Irish.

The parent group was itself diverse: some have a good knowledge of Scottish Gaelic or Irish or both, others not; a few received Irish-medium education themselves, most not; some have been in Scotland for many years, others have come only recently, although none had significant connections to Scotland before coming to live here as adults.

Specifically, we addressed the following research questions:

1. What motivates Irish parents to send their children to GME?
2. Is there a link between positive attitudes towards the Irish language and/or an ability to speak it and a desire to send their children to GME?
3. What role do they see themselves as having in the process of Gaelic language revitalization in Scotland?

The project provides original insights into the way a particular group of families, previously unstudied, are interacting with Gaelic education and Gaelic more generally. The data and analysis will help inform understandings of Gaelic as a family and community language, the role of Gaelic in education and the link between the Irish and Scottish Gaelic communities, a connection that has been promoted through various mechanisms, most obviously colmcille (www.colmcille.net). It is also anticipated that insights from Irish parents' perspectives will help highlight some of the strengths, weaknesses and idiosyncrasies of current GME provision in Scotland.

A total of 23 interviews were conducted, 14 of them in Edinburgh and 9 in Glasgow. The interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes on average. In one case both partners were interviewed, so that a total of 22 families are represented in the data set. Interviewees were given the choice of Scottish Gaelic, Irish or English as an interview language. The vast majority of interviewees opted for English as the interview language, with only one person choosing Irish

(mixed with English) and one other Gaelic.¹ The data from the interviews was recorded (with prior consent from all participants) and subsequently transcribed. The discourses and narratives produced by the 23 individuals have been analysed (using NVivo 10) and key themes explored.

The research was conducted in accordance with Heriot-Watt University's Code of Ethical Practice for Research with Human Subjects. For ethical reasons all participants are anonymous and some identifying details (including some linguistic usages) have been altered or obscured.

2. Setting the scene

(a) Irish migration to Scotland

Scotland has experienced significant emigration from Ireland from the early nineteenth century onwards. Although historically Glasgow attracted much higher levels of Irish immigration than Edinburgh (Mitchell 2008; Coogan 2002: 228-52), and is generally perceived within Scotland as having a stronger Irish community and identity, current census data shows that the number and proportion of Irish-born Edinburgh residents is actually significantly higher. According to the 2011 census (National Records of Scotland 2015), 11,106 residents of Edinburgh were born in Ireland (6,363 in Northern Ireland, 4,743 in the Republic). This represents 2.33% of the total population of 476,626. In Glasgow, 9,379 residents were born in Ireland (5,040 in Northern Ireland, 4,339 in the Republic), 1.58% of the total of 593,245. Full data on the numbers of Irish parents with children enrolled in GME in the two cities is not available (due to data protection restrictions) but it is readily apparent that the proportion significantly exceeds the general level of the Irish-born population in the two cities.

This research was limited to parents who grew up in Ireland and did not extend to parents with less immediate family connections to Ireland. It is likely that many more parents with children in GME in Edinburgh and Glasgow have such secondary connections. Several of the Irish parents in this study reported that their Scottish- or English-born partners had Irish ancestry, for example, and an earlier study on 'new speakers' of Gaelic in Edinburgh and Glasgow found that several of the Scottish-born participants who had no family connection to Scottish Gaelic reported Irish ancestry (McLeod, O'Rourke and Dunmore 2014: 6).

(b) GME in Glasgow and Edinburgh

GME has been available in Glasgow since 1985 and in Edinburgh since 1988. The Gaelic unit in Glasgow's Sir John Maxwell's Primary School was one of the first two Gaelic-medium units in Scotland (see Fraser 1989; Trebelsi 1998). In 1999, the Gaelic unit at Sir John Maxwell Primary School was replaced by a dedicated all-Gaelic primary school, Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu, and in 2006 this was expanded to take in the first all-Gaelic secondary school, so that provision

¹In one case an interviewee (F2) chose English for reasons of researcher convenience but indicated that she would have been comfortable using Irish instead. Another (M3) chose English for the interview but indicated he would also have felt comfortable using Irish.

for children aged 3-18 is available on the same site (Ó Gallchóir 2007). The school is located in the West End of the city, in Berkeley Street, and in 2014-15, at the time the research was conducted, there were 505 primary pupils and 238 secondary pupils (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2015). At all stages the establishment and expansion of GME in the city was driven by grass-roots campaigning on the part of parents and sustained parental demand (Rogers and McLeod 2007).

The development of GME in Edinburgh has been somewhat slower and somewhat more fraught. GME provision began in 1988 within a Gaelic unit, at Tollcross Primary School, west of the city centre (MacGregor 2009). A parental campaign for a dedicated Gaelic school was rejected by the local authority in 2001 and it was not until 2011 that the council agreed to establish a dedicated Gaelic school, after a renewed parental campaign. The new Gaelic school, Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Taobh na Pàirce, opened in August 2013 and had a roll of 253 in 2014-15 (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2015). As in Glasgow, demand for GME has increased rapidly following the establishment of the dedicated school; primary enrolment has almost doubled since 2009-10, when the figure was 134. There is no Gaelic secondary school in Edinburgh, but secondary GME provision is available at James Gillespie's High School, with 80 pupils enrolled in 2014-15.

3. Previous research

This study fits into the context of previous research going back to the early 1990s on the motivations, perceptions and experiences of parents who have chosen (or not chosen) GME for their children (Roberts 1991; MacNeill 1993; Stockdale, MacGregor and Munro 2003; McPake & Doughty 2006; O'Hanlon, McLeod and Paterson 2010; Stephen et al. 2010; Goalabré 2011; Scott 2013). Most of these investigations have been Scotland-wide in scope, with the exception of three studies focusing on the Western Isles or the West Highlands (Robertson 1991; Stockdale, MacGregor and Munro 2003; Goalabré 2011). There have been no studies considering the motivations and experiences of parents in urban contexts (but cf. Trabelsi 1998), or looking at parents belonging to specific cultural groups (e.g. parents from outwith Scotland). The current study is thus ground-breaking in two distinct respects.

O'Hanlon, McLeod and Paterson (2010) summarised four different kinds of reasons that parents gave for choosing GME:

The first set of reasons which people gave for the choice of Gaelic-medium education related to a sense that Gaelic was part of their heritage. This had four distinct versions – family heritage, general cultural heritage, heritage of the Highland and Islands, and Scottish heritage. In all of these there was a commitment to maintaining the heritage, and this sometimes was expressed more explicitly as a commitment to keeping the language itself in a healthy state (p. 46).

The second main set of reasons that people gave for the choice of Gaelic-medium education was the perceived benefits of a child's growing up bilingual. The most

prominent version of this was a belief in the general cognitive benefits of being bilingual, often based on the respondent's having become familiar with relevant research. There were also beliefs that bilingualism made acquiring further languages easier, and that it made children more understanding of cultural diversity (p. 51).

Parents were also attracted by various incidental features of Gaelic-medium education, in the sense of aspects of it that were not intrinsic to Gaelic or to learning through the medium of a Celtic language. The most notable concerned the size of classes and the reputation of the school in which the Gaelic-medium stream was located (p. 54).

Finally, some parents believed that other parents who were attracted to GME would be interested in and committed to education, so that joining a body of such people was seen as an attractive proposition (p. 56).

All these motivations and perceptions were strongly represented in the data collected from the Irish parents who participated in this study. Perhaps the most significant difference involves the quite distinctive ways in which Irish heritage and the relationship to the Irish language play out in relation to the first set of motivations summarised above. In addition, the Irish parents had a range of insights on linguistic and sociolinguistic aspects of the Gaelic language in Scotland that built on their previous experience with Irish.

The study also fits into the separate research context of studies dealing with the relationship between Irish and Scottish Gaeldom. These include comparative analyses of the dynamics of language activism in the two countries (e.g. McCoy with Scott 2000; McCoy 2011; McLeod 2008), as well as studies of literary and cultural interactions and influences (e.g. Ní Annracháin 1991). The study also fits within the context of historical and social research on the Irish experience in Scotland more generally (Mitchell 2008; Coogan 2002: 228-52), although work in this field generally gives little attention to the Gaelic dimension.

Finally, this research can also be contextualised in relation to other studies of recent Irish migration to Britain (e.g. Delaney 2007), most specifically work on contemporary migration on the part of educated professionals (Ryan and Kurdi 2015), which represents a dramatic change from earlier waves of Irish migration, which predominantly involved unskilled or semi-skilled labourers (e.g. in the building trade).

4. Profile of Irish parent group

All but one² of the interviewees was born and grew up in Ireland until at least age 18 and all but one had two Irish parents. None had any significant ties to Scotland before coming to live here. Of the 23 interviewees, 15 were female and 8 male. Eighteen came from the Republic (8 from Dublin; 3 from Cork; and one each from Cavan, Galway, Kerry, Kilkenny, Mayo, Meath and Tipperary). Five came from the North (two each from Belfast and Tyrone, one from Down).

²One interviewee was born in England but returned to Ireland at the age of three weeks.

A large majority of interviewees had been in Scotland for many years. Eight interviewees had been in Scotland for 15 or more years; six for 10-14 years; seven for 5-9 years; and only two less than five years. Almost half the interviewees (11 of 23) had lived in England or in other countries before settling in Scotland. In only two cases were the interviewees' children born in Ireland before the interviewee came to Scotland.

Of the 23 interviewees, eight had an Irish partner, seven had an English partner, and six a Scottish partner, one had a partner from a non-European country and one was a single parent. Of the six Scottish partners, only one had family connections to a Gaelic area, and this was a semi-fluent rather than fluent Gaelic speaker.

The 23 interviewees had 50 children between them, with families ranging in size from one to six children. Fourteen were at the pre-school stage (6 at cròileagan [playgroup for children aged 0-3] and 8 in the sgoil-àraich [nursery for children aged 3-5]); 23 were in primary school (with each class from P1 to P7 represented); and 7 were in secondary, with children ranging from S1 up to S5. Three of the youngest children were at the pre-nursery stage and thus not yet in the Gaelic system, and three siblings were in English-medium primary or secondary education. However, only seven of the 22 families had more than five years' experience of Gaelic-medium primary or secondary education (i.e. their oldest child was in P5 or below).³

The overwhelming majority of the interviewees had further or higher education qualifications, and indeed many of them initially came to Scotland to attend college or university. Interviewees' occupations varied considerably, but most fell into the category of lower managerial and professional occupations. There were also several working in higher managerial or professional occupations or as small employers and own account workers (applying the categories in the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification).

For the purposes of this report, all participants have been anonymised and assigned a code (F1-F15 for the female participants and M1-M8 for the male participants). Identifying details have been removed for ethical reasons.

5. Relationship to Irish: socialisation, acquisition and use

The interviewees varied considerably in terms of their background in relation to Irish and their language ability. The 23 interviewees can be grouped roughly into three categories in terms of their Irish language ability. Nine reported that they had high competence in Irish (or did so at an earlier stage in life, typically at the end of their secondary education), eight reported medium competence, and six low. Only two of the nine interviewees with high competence in Irish had a partner who also had high competence. The interviewees also reported considerable variation in their family language backgrounds in relation to Irish, although in most cases there was a clear

³One family had children older than this but had moved to Scotland from Ireland after the children had started school (in Irish medium).

correlation between their own ability and that of their parents. For example, none of those with low ability in Irish reported that either of their parents had high ability in the language. None of the interviewees received all their primary and secondary education through Irish, but seven (all of whom were in the 'high competence' group) had attended an Irish-medium school at some stage of their education. None of the speakers were brought up in an Irish-speaking home although several reported that Irish was used by their parents to some extent when they were growing up.

5.1 Past socialization and language use

Those reporting high competence in the language tended to come from backgrounds where Irish had a meaningful presence in the home, at school or both. One interviewee reported that a strong family connection to Irish and a positive school experience instilled in her a 'real raw love' for the language:

F2 My dad was an Irish teacher and so we have always, not native speakers in that sense, born speaking English but very much spoke Irish from a very early age within the family. And like all children in Ireland, since the Irish Republic began, learning Irish in school from, from a very early age really. . . . And then as I went through school I really loved the language . . . So I went to secondary school through Irish as well. Everything, all languages, history, science, geography the whole thing. So it is a real raw love.

However, this high ability in Irish did not necessarily lead to intensive Irish use in the home. This interviewee explained that although both her parents were good Irish speakers who felt a 'political affiliation' with the language, they did not actually speak much Irish at home:

I *How much Irish did you use in the home?*

F2 A token. And that is probably what I am doing with my kids.

I [. . .] *If your parents were so keen on Irish, why didn't they use more Irish at home?*

F2 Let's see, why they didn't use more Irish? Don't know. Don't have an answer. Good question.

I *Did it change over time?*

F2 No. It stayed the same.

Some parents who reported having had a high competence in Irish earlier in life reported a lack of immediate fluency, but that the language 'is kind of wired in' and therefore if required can be drawn upon and 'it all comes back':

I *[H]ow would you say is your competence in Irish these days?*

M4 It is funny, because I learnt it early, I find it is kind of wired in. If someone was to come up and start getting into a real tight vernacular from some particular village in the west, I would probably struggle with that. But more generally, a few words here and there, no bother at all, it all comes back.

I *Would you be able to do a conversation like this in Irish, do you think?*

M4 I'd struggle with the vocab now. I have really not used it since I left school, because I went to [name of place abroad]. Sometimes you see something like the *fáinne*,⁴ someone with the *fáinne* and all that kind of stuff [...] I have lost a lot of it but the roots are still there. And reasonably strong. I was asked to say a few words in Irish at [a family event] last year. You know, I didn't have any anxiety about it. I practised it and what not.

Parents reporting medium competence in the language pointed out that although they would struggle with the language, they had enough Irish to be able to engage in conversations and to draw on a fairly solid background in the language to be able to put it to use. These parents typically reported a lack of engagement with Irish as a living language, however:

I *Growing up Irish for you was really just a school subject? Not much more?*

M2 Yes. That was it. So it is something I did that I was relatively good at but it wasn't alive, as a cultural thing or social thing around me.

I *You didn't travel to the Gaeltacht?*

M2 No. That was never on the horizon either as something you might do.

Those reporting low competence in the language talked about their inability to, as one parent put it, 'string a sentence together', often despite reasonable performance in the language as a school subject and, in some cases, trips to the Gaeltacht to attend Irish summer colleges:

F13 I learned Irish, as most Irish people do, for fourteen years, and kind of enjoyed it but never really felt I could string a sentence together. Although I did reasonably well at Leaving Cert Irish. I went to the Gaeltacht for three summers and loved it. But again, I suppose I didn't make the most of my opportunity in terms of my fluency.

While all Irish parents brought up in the Republic would have gone through the school system and thereby would typically have had extensive exposure to Irish, individuals' experiences with the language in the course of their schooling differed greatly. One parent reported not having perceived value in learning Irish and failing to reach any meaningful competence:

M6 [W]hilst I would never have spoken Irish, or volunteered to do so, structured Irish took place, at least one class every day, certainly through secondary school. Taught using a particular way. It is one of the compulsory ... you had to do Irish, you had to do maths, you had to do English. [...] in my school it always led to the position 'I can see why English is quite good, and I see why I need to know maths, but my time spent doing Irish, other than contributing towards points to get into university, if I get to a certain grade in it ...'. It was a means to an end. It was never something that was ever particularly pursued. Probably as a result of the school I went to [...] I would be about the worst product of the system of Irish, in terms of my understanding of Irish. I am about as low as you can get. Everybody else in Ireland who has done as much learning in Irish, time in Irish, in school as I have, will be much better than me, I guarantee it.

⁴The *fáinne* is a ring-shaped pin badge worn in order to signify fluency in Irish or a willingness to speak it.

In general, however, even amongst those reporting medium (and in some case higher) levels of competence, there was a lack of confidence amongst many Irish parents in their own linguistic abilities in Irish. Some reported higher linguistic skills in other languages they had learned at school, as illustrated in the following two examples:

F1 I wasn't very confident in it but I did enjoy the experience [...] I never was fluent in, as Gaeilge, and in fact to my shame my French and Italian are probably equally as good as my Irish. I seemed to be able to take on those languages easier. Or in a more fluent way anyhow...

F3 Even native Irish speakers I can't eavesdrop them. I could eavesdrop French, German, Italian, some Spanish but I couldn't eavesdrop a native speaker [...]

In some cases, this lack of confidence seemed to deter parents from using the language altogether, even when opportunities arose for such use:

I *Now, when you meet people who speak Irish would you speak Irish to them?*

F14 I would be self-conscious about it, actually. I don't feel . . . I wouldn't label myself as an Irish speaker.

I *Why not?*

F14 Because I am nowhere near . . . I can't carry out a conversation. I'll kind of back off . . . I have got a level of language but I am not able to carry out a higher level

Some of the interviewees mentioned other Irish parents they knew and indicated where opportunities for them to speak the language arose. However, their perceived lack of competence inhibited them from engaging through Irish in these situations. This was often despite the fact that they had performed well in the language at school and considered their language skills at that stage to be acceptable:

I *How would you rate your level of Irish at the moment?*

F8 I don't know. If I am reading it I can figure out what it is saying. But it is when people are talking to me. Like the first time I met [other parent] in the playgroup and he spoke to me across the room, because there were kids playing in between and he was speaking in Irish. I could understand what he was saying, it took me a few seconds to figure it out. And me trying to put something together to say back to him and I felt that all eyes were on us. I was mortified. So I wouldn't say it would be great. It must have been all right to get the B [in the Leaving Cert exam], but I just feel as soon as I started at college, everything just went out my head.

This parent's qualification that his Irish 'must have been alright before' is important and reflects the "slippage" in Irish, the attrition of language skills common to the majority of people who go through the Irish school system (Ó Riagáin 1997; Murtagh 2003).

Many parents talked about different phases and moments in their lives when Irish had slipped in and out of use. Thus while they may be out of practice with their Irish just now, there is potential for this to change as circumstances change or as opportunities to use the language arise:

M5 I would be a bit rusty. I am sort of going through phases. I did a bit of work for [name of Irish language body] and sort of . . . during that time I was using it quite a bit . . .

In contrast to interviewees from the Republic, those from the North did not experience mandatory Irish as part of their schooling, so that some of them had very little contact with the language at all, even though four of the six Northern interviewees had attended Catholic schools. One interviewee reported as follows:

I *Did you study Irish in school at all?*

F4 Almost no Irish. I think in primary school we had sort of . . . we learnt a song, 'Around the Mulberry Bush' in Irish, I can't remember it now but I remember learning it. And I think we learned prayers and we learned some words. I knew how to say *druid an doras* and then by being in Ireland you pick up words like *sláinte* and *Céad Míle Fáilte* but actually I wouldn't say I really had any proper formal Gaelic lessons.

Others had somewhat more contact with the language as an optional subject at school or through involvement in cultural activities, in particular Irish music.

All of the Northern respondents, however, explicitly referred to the political connotations linked to the language when they were growing up. In one case, the circumstances experienced by the interviewee when growing up were quite fraught:

F14 I feel it is still a political issue. For ages, we weren't allowed to call my brother Seán when you were out in public, he had to be John, when we went to certain areas. It was just a lot of fear and a lot of stigma. Although the situation has changed, I am still conscious there is still ... a lot of my friends have been shot [...] There are not that many Irish speakers in the North unfortunately

Given this political background, this interviewee's parents decided not to send her to an all-Irish school, and as a result, her use of Irish declined:

F14 My father spoke Irish at home to both me and my sister. Both my parents speak Irish but mum just spoke English. I mostly spoke Irish until I went to primary school. My parents were considering an all-Irish school and chose not to because of the political situation at the time. So once I went to school my Irish dropped off.

5.2 Current use of Irish in the home

Most of the respondents reported making some use of Irish in the home with their children, although these efforts were generally quite limited. This consisted of some sporadic use of the

language with their partner, particularly in cases where both parents were Irish. Some parents also reported some use of Irish with their children, although in most cases this was, as the parent in the excerpt below describes, as a 'token' and often restricted to specific activities such as songs or odd words and phrases:

I *At home . . . how much Irish did you use in the home?*

F2 A token. And that is probably what I am doing with my kids. They can sing lots of songs. I don't know if they could tell you what all the songs mean. We use words but we don't speak [Irish] my partner and I – my partner is from [Irish town].

I *And you mentioned your partner is from [Irish town], did you meet him here? [...]*

F2 I met him here. And there is a real language thing. We speak a lot of Irish. We really do love it. It is a real connection. It really has been for us. But I am sure, for other people you are interviewing, it is the language you can speak ... like with Gaelic I am sure, that you can speak a lot of places and you don't think anyone can understand you. So we speak English at home quite a lot, we speak a bit of Irish with the kids, but I call it a token in a sense that it is more about music and things like that. Then we would speak Irish to each other quite a bit. Especially if we are out or on the phone.

One interviewee (F9) who reported a lack of confidence in her spoken Irish nevertheless used Irish so consistently when changing her young daughter's nappies that her partner also had to learn key phrases in Irish in order to ensure that their daughter co-operated with him when he did the changing.

There were, however, four cases where the use of Irish went beyond sporadic use and where a conscious effort was being made to use the language with their children. Three of these fall into the 'high' competence category, with the other describing her language ability as 'low'. One respondent (M3), with children aged 2 and 4, reported that he had used Irish consistently with both children from the time of their birth, but that their mother had only limited competence in Irish, so that the children were strongly English-dominant, particularly the younger child. M1 reported regular use of Irish with all his children and before moving to Scotland had sent his older sons and daughters to an Irish-medium school (Gaelscoil). M8 had made a conscious decision to speak Irish with his two children from when they born. Although his partner, who was not of Irish origin, did not speak any Irish, he was committed to making Irish his main language of communication with the children. His commitment to using the language when interacting with the children was confirmed through participant observations carried out by one of the researchers in the study. M8 had also begun to develop a significant level of competence in Gaelic and often code-switched between the two languages when communicating with his children. Although F14 described her ability to speak Irish as 'low', she was nevertheless strongly committed to transmitting Irish to her daughter. One of the researchers in the study had opportunities to observe F14's linguistic behaviour on several occasions and on all of these, Irish was the main language used with the child. F14 commented that her ability in Irish was sufficient to allow her to engage with the level of language required of a one-year old child but feared that as her daughter grew older, this level might soon become insufficient.

6. Moving to Scotland: when and why?

The interviewees came to Scotland for a range of personal and professional reasons. Some came to study at university, some came for work reasons, some came for relationship reasons (having met a Scottish partner), and some made what might be called a lifestyle choice, choosing to move to Edinburgh or Glasgow because it was perceived as offering a better quality of life or better educational opportunities for their children than the place they had been living in previously (e.g. London). However, in no case did any of the interviewees report having come to Scotland because of a specific interest in Gaelic (as was the case with most of the non-Scottish participants in McLeod, O'Rourke and Dunmore's study (2014) of 'new speakers' of Gaelic in Edinburgh and Glasgow).

None of the interviewees reporting having any meaningful knowledge of Gaelic language and culture in Scotland before they came. Even those who went through Irish-medium education reported that they learned very little about Gaelic Scotland and Scottish Gaelic when at school. One interviewee, who had attended an Irish-medium secondary school, reported as follows:

I *Thinking back, when you were growing up . . . was Scotland something you ever heard much about, Gaelic Scotland in particular?*

F2 No, not at all, not at all. And actually very aware of it when I came here, no idea about Scottish history whatsoever and I think here, vice versa, no idea about Irish history. At all. Maybe some . . . no, none. I don't think, I didn't have any awareness, no, no.

Others reported having only vague information or ideas about Gaelic in Scotland:

I *Did you know anything about Gaelic?*

F10 Just that it was derived from Gaeilge, mostly Highlanders, mostly island people, that it was a native language but not widely spoken, so I guess in that way similar to Irish.

I *Would you have known much about [Scottish] Gaelic culture before you went over?*

F5 No. Mel Gibson kind of . . . the Clearances, they pushed us off our land, the same kind of story that went on [in Ireland] but in a different way. But basically something that is marginalised, something that is subdued. But quite crude.

Another respondent realised that he had understood Gaelic in Scotland through an Irish lens, so to speak, that was not entirely appropriate:

I *When you were growing up did you have much awareness of not just Scotland, but specifically the Gaelic dimension of Scotland, the Gaelic language and culture in Scotland?*

M2 In a vague way. I didn't . . . and I realise now what I didn't know. The whole Highland/Lowland split in terms of Gaelic culture, about how far back . . . the speaking of Lowland Scots and I just didn't know that history. I had assumed it was like Ireland.

I *That the whole country had been Gaelic speaking?*

M2 That there was a Gaelic-speaking culture and this had been pushed to one side by Anglo domination. Which didn't explain Robbie Burns to me. That is how vague my knowledge was. I thought there was a general Gaelic culture across the whole country. That was underneath everything. Wherever you go in Ireland, all of the place names, you dig underneath and think 'what was that in Irish originally? How do you get to this funny Anglicised name?'

One of the interviewees from Northern Ireland expressed a slightly different perspective, although she too had only a 'low awareness' of Gaelic in Scotland:

I *Did you have much knowledge or awareness of Gaelic culture in Scotland?*

F4 I had a low awareness. Like through the music, I knew they spoke a form of Irish! But I suppose to be fair, Northern Ireland Gaelic is closer to Gaelic in a way. I would have recognised the language. I would have thought it was Irish probably. [. . .] In a way I would have more awareness of Scots.

Some of those interviewees who had attended Irish-medium schools reported some more specific details, but even these were somewhat sketchy. One father who went to an Irish-medium primary school commented as follows:

I *Can you say [. . .] what you knew about Gaelic in Scotland when you were growing up? Was that something you ever heard about?*

M3 No, I mean when we did the stories like Fionn mac Cumhaill and Sétanta, Cú Chulainn, there was one where he, Cú Chulainn, goes across to Scotland to learn warrior skills from this woman called Scáthach, this Scottish warrior lady. That is about it. I remember in the Leaving Certificate, at the end of secondary school, we had to do a thing that they tacked on at the end of Irish class about the history of Irish, the kind of . . . the linguistic connections between Ireland and the Isle of Man and Scotland and things like that. I was scratching my head going 'Why are you telling us this now? You could have told us this years ago. You might have got people interested.' I had no real idea that if you were very good at Irish and you went to the Isle of Man, but not anymore, at a particular time, you could have spoken Gaelic, or if you went to the north of Scotland, the islands and stuff, you could have had a conversation with them in Gaelic, which had never been stressed or pointed out at all.

Another parent, who attended an Irish-medium secondary school, recounted a more specific anecdote:

F11 Sorley MacLean came to the school. That is the only thing I remember. A group from Scotland came to visit the school and we were told we were all to come in and sit down,

that this really famous Gaelic poet from Scotland was coming to visit us because he wanted to start a school like ours in Scotland. So there were about four or five of them came and I remember our school played music, like they do in the Gaelic school here, fiddles and all, and he said then to us, I am going to read you a poem about the sea, and you might not understand it but if you listen really carefully you can hear the sea in my voice. And I remember I did hear the sea. That is the only thing I can remember about Scots Gaelic in all my years at school.

One interviewee (F7) reported learning some Scottish Gaelic songs from her father, who had a strong interest in culture and history, and also that some Scottish pipe tunes were well-known in her area of Ireland.

Several participants noted ways in which their Irish cultural background or their knowledge of Irish allowed them to adjust to Scotland or familiarise themselves with the country. One interviewee noted that after arriving in Glasgow she found herself making ‘a link with people from the Islands and Highlands’: ‘I suppose there was a recognition of something similar in our backgrounds and how we were brought up and that idea of culture and identity made me feel close to them’ (F1). Two commented that they were able to understand Gaelic place names, especially mountain names, in ways that non-Gaelic speaking Scots could not. One of them observed as follows:

M3 Even today I go up on the hills at the weekends and whenever we go north, I know the names of the mountains, I am not pronouncing it properly in the Scots Gaelic sense, because the pronunciations are different sometimes but I am much more confident at taking a stab at it than people who have climbed all the Munros but couldn’t name half of them.

7. GME: awareness, motivations and experiences

7.1. Awareness of GME

Parents reported that they first discovered the existence of GME and its viability as an educational option through very different mechanisms. Word of mouth was the commonest means – a pattern in line with previous research findings concerning GME (Stephen et al. 2010: 54; Scott 2014: 14) – but this could take quite different forms. For example, one parent (M8) said that the cròileagan was recommended by the woman who ran the antenatal group he attended with his partner, another (F8) reported a recommendation by the estate agent who helped them buy a different flat and another (F6) learned about GME through a social connection to one of the Gaelic teachers. Other parents’ initial contact was more fortuitous: one mother (F9) reported learning about the existence of the Edinburgh Gaelic school from seeing children from the school playing shinty in the park and another (F11) explained that she had spotted the Glasgow Gaelic School in a ‘completely arbitrary’ way while cycling in the area and

was immediately attracted to the school because she had received part of her own education through Irish.

7.2. Motivations for choosing GME

Irish parents were motivated by a variety of reasons when it came to sending their children to GME. The reasons given correspond broadly to those found in previous research on motivations for choosing GME more generally. These can be divided into three broad categories: (a) heritage and identity (family, community, regional, national), (b) the perceived benefits of bilingualism (cognitive and cultural) and (c) perceived quality of the school and school ethos/community (including perceptions of other parents as being committed and engaged) (cf. O'Hanlon, McLeod and Paterson 2010: 46-56).

a) *Heritage and identity*

This section will examine the motivations of the parents in the study for sending their children to GME based on reasons of heritage and identity. The heritage reasons pertain to the family connection to Ireland, attempts at integrating into the local and national community in Scotland as well as attempting to give the children an understanding of the place in which they have been raised.

Connection to Ireland

For many of the parents, putting their children through GME offered the possibility of a continued connection with Irish while they were in Scotland. For many of the parents, they consider their children as Irish as much as themselves, despite being raised – or even born – in Scotland. The motivations for choosing GME therefore are often founded on a belief in a shared connection between Irish and Scottish Gaelic. Indeed, one Edinburgh respondent explained that Gaelic can act to reinforce their Irish identity away from Ireland:

F8 OK, maybe I do feel more of an affinity to the Irish language than I thought. It is like not specifically the Irish language, but at least learning the Gaelic is keeping them a bit closer to their Irish heritage, whereas learning German, obviously not. . . .

I *Is it important to you that the children develop a sense of an Irish connection?*

F8 Yes, they have Irish passports and I think of them as being Irish.

Parents who emphasised the link to Ireland often referred specifically to connections with family members back in Ireland:

F3 I think it will add so much culturally and it will connect him with his cousins back in Ireland so it will add to his understanding back in Ireland.

M7 I know they are thrilled when they go to Ireland and they can understand their cousins and their cousins can understand them when speaking or hearing Gaelic.

Or they read road signs that say *trá* and they are like ‘oh my god, beach!’ They love that. That is the greatest. They very much like it. And they very much like that I can understand what they are saying sometimes, or my brother ... if he puts on a funny Donegal, cod Donegal accent. They can understand him. So there is a tiny bit of that and they like it.

Sometimes such contacts with Irish-speaking relatives provided a source of amusement:

F7 An rud eile a tha really èibhinn nuair a tha sinn a’ dol dhachaigh, tha m’ athair [. . .] uill, tha m’ athair *fhathast* a’ dol ann an Gaeilge, so air aon taobh, tha esan ag ràdh ‘Blah, blah, blah’ ann an Gaeilge agus an uair sin tha [mo nighean] ag ràdh ‘Right, blah, blah, blah’ ann an Gàidhlig agus chan eil fhios ’am a bheil na dithis a’ tuigsinn ach tha iad a chum’ a’ dol so [*gaireachdaich*] tha còmhradh èibhinn a’ dol . . .

(the other thing that’s really funny when we go home, my father . . . well, my father still keeps going in Irish, so on one side, he’ll say ‘Blah, blah, blah’ in Irish and then [my daughter] says ‘Right, blah, blah, blah’ in Gaelic and I don’t know if the two of them understand [each other] but they keep going so [*laughing*] there’s a funny conversation going on . . .)

Some parents pointed out that Gaelic served not only as a mechanism for connection to Ireland but as a bridge between Scotland and Ireland:

M2 There is a sort of vague thing about creating a connection, doing something that culturally ties you to Ireland.

I To Ireland or Scotland?

M2 To both. We are in Scotland. And so your kids are going to go to a Scottish school and they are endlessly learning things that we think ‘that is different’. There is a generational thing but this is a cultural thing. There is something that seems ... it is a very vague sense, but culturally shared it seems to us to be an automatic thing that you might do.

M8 I mean, sé mo thuairim féin, mar tá Gaeilge agus Gaidhlig chomh gar dá chéile, agus mar go bhfuil Gaeilge agam, sé an seans agam teagmháil idir mé féin agus mo pháistí a dhéanamh, teagmháil idir mo pháistí agus an áit a tógadh mise a dhéanamh, agus teagmháil idir mé féin agus an tír ina bhfuil mé mar emigrant ann a dhéanamh. So sin the interweaving of things that Gàidhlig-medium education gives to me and my family.

(I mean, my own view is, is Irish and Gaelic are so close to each other, and since I have Irish, this is my chance to make a connection between me and my children, to make a connection between my children and the place where I was raised, and to make a connection between myself and the country in which I am living as an emigrant. So that’s the interweaving of things that Gàidhlig-medium education gives to me and my family).

Re-integration to Ireland

Coupled with keeping a continued link to Ireland while living in Scotland, several of the interviewees cited a belief that a knowledge of Gaelic might help their children reintegrate in Ireland more easily if the family were to move back at some stage. Representative of this view are interviewees F10 and F11:

F11 I suppose there was also the thing that we thought, 'maybe we will go back home' and if we will the kids will have to do Irish in school and this might help them, if that would happen, this would help them, if they had this knowledge of Gaelic.

F10 It is always in the back of my mind, if we ever did move back to Ireland, he wouldn't perhaps be totally at a loss, if he was moving at an older age to a different school.

However, as we will see later on in section 10 below, most interviewees said they were now firmly rooted in Scotland, or would not contemplate going back to Ireland under any circumstances.

Integration in Scotland

Another key motivator for many of the interviewees is using GME to help their children connect with Scotland, the land in which they have been raised, or even born:

F4 I also thought going to the Gaelic school would give him more of a sense of being from Scotland. Because he kind of wasn't from anywhere in a way. And I think like it is nice to feel like you belong to the place that you grow up. And being a child from England, with an Irish mother that is living in [Scotland], I can imagine it might be easy to feel a bit rootless.

F3 . . . wouldn't it be great for them, having been born in Scotland to know a bit of Scottish [Gaelic]. That is a very important point. It is terrible that it isn't standard in the curriculum.

F12 We went to Skye in the summer . . . we did the family week at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and also just learning Gaelic and being more north, and kind of seeing signs and feeling I know the north of Scotland slightly better just through even just the conversations I do in my class and place names, I feel slightly more connected to it.

An irony here, as flagged up in the previous section, is that so few Scots actually know Gaelic and that some Irish parents appear to perceive a more important role for Gaelic within Scottishness than many Scots do.

b) Bilingualism, multilingualism and cultural awareness

Many of the parents viewed bilingualism as an important educational benefit for their children. These parents cited second language acquisition and the potential cognitive, social and cultural benefits of bilingualism as a key factor motivating them to send their children to GME. These perceptions and motivations align with the findings of earlier research on the choice of GME by parents more generally (O'Hanlon, McLeod and Paterson 2010: 51).

F10 Obviously the bilingual thing, people want their kids to expand their horizons a little bit I guess. Having a second language is a good starting point for that. A lot of those kids [at the Edinburgh Gaelic school] would have three languages. [. . .] I like the idea of them having another language. I like the idea of bilingualism, maybe trilingualism.

F5 And it just looked interesting in terms of language acquisition and giving that a gift to your kid. And also I was really struck by the stuff . . . I don't know how evidence-based it is but around empathy and diplomacy skills and your ability to relate to another person's point of view.

While the cognitive and developmental aspects of language acquisition were often seen as the primary motivation to undertake GME, these were frequently coupled with potential cultural connections:

M5 Obviously I think there is very important cultural reasons for doing it but from a purely practical standpoint I think it absolutely opens their ears to different languages and probably lots of other things.

F3 What builds on that is bringing up a child, not bilingual but a good command of another language and I would hope was a kind of step towards learning other languages [. . .] I don't necessarily fit with the hypothesis of Irish people choosing Gaelic medium to keep in touch with their homeland or keep in touch with their native language – it is an interest, almost a broader interest in languages.

M6 There is just a number of benefits that we saw on doing it. They all the bilingual aspect of things. Which could have been achieved had they been studying in French or Chinese, as it would have been in Gaelic. It was very important. But there was also a community aspect of it we really liked. The community aspect and being how much music seems to be a part of the curriculum in the Gaelic environment.

One of the parents who had received part of her own education through Irish viewed bilingual education as something that had been of benefit to her and she wished her own children to experience something similar: 'it had given me this particular view of the world that I cherish very much and I felt that was what I wanted my children to have' (F11).

Several of the parents interviewed did talk of disagreements with their spouse over the usefulness of learning Gaelic. These disputes centred not on the benefits of multilingualism, but more on the potential value of having Gaelic itself as one of the languages. In the end, though, the potential cultural benefits and community links that Gaelic could generate tended to override any doubts over the potential future use the children might get from Gaelic:

F6 [My husband] would have preferred if it was a French school or an Italian school. He wasn't totally hung up on the fact that it was a Gaelic school but he had learned some more about multilingualism and bilingualism and he was quite positive about the kids having an extra language. But if there had been a French school and a Gaelic school, he would have thought 'should we not go to the French school, would that not be more useful?' Whereas I was very positively predisposed towards the Gaelic, because I thought 'they are Scottish kids and I would like them to have a link with their heritage'.

M6 [My wife] became aware, through a lot of research of the Gaelic nursery and we talked a lot about it and a lot about the investment in Gaelic. The usual reservations you have about 'am I immersing someone in something that is of any value, and what are you giving up in order to do that'.

Some of these parents expressed a distinctly pragmatic point of view in relation to the choice of Gaelic medium:

F13 But it is not because I am desperate for [my daughter] to be fluent in Gaelic. Or for her to have a career in Gaelic or for any huge interest in the current revival of the language. Do you know what I mean? In some ways we are taking advantage of the current resurgence and all the kind of interest and resources that are being thrown at Gaelic. But I don't feel guilty about it.

In contrast, other parents were clear that they would not have chosen immersion in a language other than Gaelic:

I If there had been a German or French or Spanish-medium school in Edinburgh instead of Gaelic, do you think you might have chosen that instead?

F8 No, I don't think so. No.

I Why not?

F8 You are making me think about things that I have not thought about! Yes, why not? I guess because learning Gaelic is . . . OK, maybe I do feel more of an affinity to the Irish language than I thought. It is like not specifically the Irish language, but at least learning the Gaelic is keeping them a bit closer to their Irish heritage, whereas learning German, obviously not. So no. Although the learning another language aspect definitely appeals to me [. . .], I don't think I would have gone out and sought to send them somewhere to learn any other language.

Another parent specifically rejected the alternative of a French school (even though he spoke French fluently), for socio-economic reasons:

M2 I think possibly there would have been a class thing there too for me.

I How do you mean?

M2 My sense of who would be attracted to a French medium school. I am an inverted snob about things like this.

This parent vigorously rejected the suggestion that the Gaelic school in Glasgow might itself be understood as an elitist option, arguing that the pupils at the school came from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

c) Attractiveness of the school and school community

A further benefit of GME cited by the parents in the research was the attractiveness of the school and school community. Again, such perceptions align clearly with earlier research findings on parents' reasons for choosing GME (O'Hanlon, McLeod and Paterson 2010: 54, 56; see section 3 above), and are not distinct to parents of Irish origin. In some cases the attractiveness of the school could be simply a matter of geography – being close to interviewees' home or workplace – but more often it related to the school ethos and the parent community.

One of the interviewees summarised his view as follows:

F7 We sent our kids to [the Gaelic] school because we liked the school and we wanted them to get a good education. And of course if a school has a good reputation, parents will send their children there. Even if they have no Gaelic and they don't really understand what it is about [...] It is a lovely school.

Other parents pointed more specifically to the attractiveness of the parent community:

F3 Starting point is . . . the nice school, the nice sense of community around it, meeting broadly like-minded, a lot of like-minded people at the playgroup... I think it is a nice community that has kind of evolved around the Gaelic medium.

F15 Already I can see there is a really good network and really good community atmosphere and it just feels nice. It feels good.

In some cases, parents were initially doubtful about the viability of the Gaelic-medium option but were won over by the consistent view they heard from others about the quality and attractiveness of the school:

F4 We were looking at schools in Glasgow and we were looking at what is a good school. And for a variety of reasons, we ended up settling on the Gaelic school. [. . .] A few people actually said to me, 'it is an excellent school, you should consider it'. And initially I kind of laughed it off and said 'oh, you are mad, I can't speak Gaelic,

never mind Gaelic and I am not getting involved in that'. But then having looked at the school options, and having spoken with people who were consistently saying 'it is a really good school, it is a really good school' . . .

- F6 We sent our kids to that school because we liked the school and we wanted them to get a good education. And of course if a school has a good reputation, parents will send their children there. Even if they have no Gaelic and they don't really understand what it is about.

Some parents commented in more detail about particular aspects of the parent group. One mother highlighted the issue of diversity in the Edinburgh school:

- F5 There is lots of different nationalities and languages. To some extent a little bit of colour difference, which is nice. I liked the diversity. I liked the fact ... [. . .] that there is socio-economic diversity as well in the school. That is important to me. That is why I wouldn't have chosen private if I could have afforded it, which I can't. So overall, very positive.

In some cases, parents' decisions to choose GME was a matter of selecting from different options, with the school that offered GME being perceived as more attractive than their local school. One parent commented as follows, referring specifically to the English-medium primary school situated closest to the Gaelic school:

I *The other option would have been the [name of place] school, which wouldn't have been as good a school?*

- F13 That is what they say but I do believe it is very much improving. It is also a much bigger school, in terms of the numbers, I think there is four P1 classes. And the building itself is crumbling and I am so . . . I just think we are so lucky to have such a state of the art, newly refurbished building. Cause I sort of feel . . . when Miss [name] [the head teacher] goes in in the morning she is not thinking about 'what am I going to do about the boiler?', she is able, because she has great facilities, she is able to focus on supporting the teachers to give really good education, as opposed to [name of place] Primary where they have no gym. The toilets are crumbling and there are all those material issues which have to detract from the resources you can put into actually teaching. So yes, I just think that is another big advantage.

In some cases parents were willing to accept the inconvenience of placing the children in a more distant school:

- F13 . . . we were thinking 'right, what are we going to do?' and it was basically a case of 'do we move to East Lothian, or Midlothian or West Lothian for a bigger house?'. I think I was now pregnant with [daughter], and to get into a more desirable school than [name of place] Primary. So we kind of spent a little bit of time thinking about moving to East Lothian and we really wanted to stay in town and then I came back to thinking 'there is absolutely no reason not to send her to Gaelic school. [My partner] is still working in Tollcross, I think it would be a brilliant opportunity. It would be logistically more difficult

than sending her to [name of place] Primary, but I think it would be brilliant.’ So we made that decision.

Four parents (F3, F5, M7 and M8) expressed antipathy to private schools and framed their choice of GME within that point of view. Interviewee F3 spoke especially forcefully on this point:

F3 I hate this bloody catchment area thing that they have in Britain. It is awful. Edinburgh is horrific with this whole private school, social apartheid. It makes me really, really angry. Really angry. So here is a state school that parents are really involved in, that is well resourced and you have the bonus of them learning what should be the language of Scotland.

Finally, one Edinburgh parent referred to the fact that children from Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce move on to James Gillespie’s High School, which is highly regarded:

M8 The icing on the cake ag an am nuair a thosaigh muid ann [at the time when we started there], it feeds into this high school, the best non-fee paying school in Edinburgh, possibly in Scotland. So, kind of icing on the cake, that definitely is.

This issue does not arise in Glasgow, where children remain on the same campus and move to the secondary section of the Glasgow Gaelic School.

d) Choosing Irish-medium education in Ireland

Although all the parents interviewed had chosen GME in Scotland, there was considerable divergence in interviewees’ perceptions of Irish-medium education in Ireland. While several parents indicated that they would certainly have chosen Irish-medium education had they remained in Ireland, others were doubtful and others were certain that they would not have done so. Above and beyond the issue of educational choices, these differences of opinion shed light on interviewees’ views of the status and perception of Gaelic in Scotland as against Irish in Ireland.

Favourable views

All parents who had themselves received some Irish-medium education reported a positive experience and on this basis stated that they would have ‘definitely’ or ‘almost certainly’ (M4) chosen a similar educational pathway for their children if they had been living in Ireland. This favourable perception of Irish-medium education also influenced their interest in GME, which they saw as a similar type of educational model which they wished their children to experience. In contrast, some of the interviewees with no experience of Irish-medium education themselves expressed less certainty on this point.

For one of the interviewees, originally from Dublin, who had received part of his education through the medium of Irish education, GME was a ‘no-brainer’:

M7 I associate Celtic language medium education with academic super-excellence, with incredibly committed teachers, with music, dancing, the arts, literature, with a kind of . . . an incredible self-confidence, with bi-cultural, bi-lingual super-happiness.

Although somewhat exuberantly phrased, this perception can be understood as a reflection of the high academic standing of some of the Irish-medium schools, especially in Dublin.

Several of those parents (e.g. F3, F6, F15, M7) who expressed favourable views of Irish-medium education noted that one or more of their siblings in Ireland had put their children into Irish-medium schools and had positive experiences there.

Mixed views

Other respondents expressed broadly favourable views towards Irish-medium education, but expressed degrees of doubt, or indicated that a number of factors would have to be taken into consideration.

I Just maybe on a more hypothetical level, if transport was reasonably convenient would you have [chosen an Irish-medium school]?

F1 Yes, I would have then. But it would depend on the ethos of the school and more than just about the language. Yes.

I If you were in Ireland would you have sent them to a Gaelscoil, do you think?

F10 I don't know. For me it is not . . . I wouldn't have known that many Gaelscoils, I don't think. I don't know if it would have come on my radar. I guess it depends where we would have been living and . . .

I If it was in your local area.

F10 If it was a town or city or . . . but maybe. I don't know. It might have been something we would have thought about. But it came here quicker. Just more exposure I think.

Another parent would have been open to the possibility of sending her children to a Gaelscoil in Ireland, but perceived Irish-medium schools as being less welcoming to parents who did not themselves speak the language:

F13 I just get the impression it is ... I think Gaelic medium is 'come and try, speak any Gaelic you can', whereas that seems quite different to the impression I got from the Gaelscoil in Dublin. But I don't know. That is just what I hear. I don't know if it is changing.

Negative views

Two parents (M6, F12) were very clear that they would not have chosen Irish-medium education in Ireland and two others (F8, F9) said they would 'probably not' have done so. One of the parents who expressed doubt said 'I would say probably not. It probably just wouldn't have occurred to me to do that', partly 'I think because they would have learned Irish no matter what

at home, no matter what kind of school we sent them to whereas here obviously they wouldn't necessarily have learnt any Gaelic had they not been going to Gaelic school' (F8).

In contrast, the parents who firmly rejected Irish-medium education tended to associate it with a vision or version of Irishness to which they felt little or no affiliation:

I *If you were living in Ireland do you think you would have gone down the route of a Gaelscoil?*

M6 Absolutely no way.

I *No? Why not?*

M6 I just don't think it is operated in the same way. . . .When I was a kid Gaelscoils would have been 'I am going off the Gaeltacht for six weeks during the summer', frankly because it is part government-funded and from my parents perspective that would have represented a holiday they couldn't afford and an experience they couldn't afford. There is a negative feel towards Irish in Ireland that you don't get here. [. . .] I certainly don't want to go anywhere near referendums or anything but there is a nationalist element in Scotland that where you may or may not agree with people's choices, 'you learn Gaelic and you do Gaelic? Oh that is great'. I don't think that exists in Ireland. People would go 'you are learning Irish, that is a bit twee'. Ireland is really international. All over the world. America, Europe. We are in the middle here. We need to be a bit more fluid. We are the tech guys and we do all this and we need to stop with all the fiddling and the bodhrán playing. That is how people see us and we don't like that. I quite like that aspect of our culture but I certainly don't like to be stereotyped in that way.

F12 If I was living in Ireland I probably wouldn't be sending my children to the [Irish-medium school] because there it felt like someone who was doing that, that was a bit of a statement about your allegiances, whereas I never felt that strongly, so . . .

I *About political allegiances?*

R Yes, or I would never have made a statement about political allegiances, or I would have felt that I had to be in the conclave of Irish speaking, fiddle playing, you know, I would have to be more Irish than I felt to do that.

7.3. Experiences with GME

Almost all parents expressed a very high level of satisfaction with the experience of GME, describing themselves, for example, as being 'really pleased' (F13). One mother commented of the Glasgow school:

F1 What a great school it is and how thoroughly delighted I am to have chosen it. No regrets ever.

An Edinburgh father said that GME had 'far exceeded' his expectations, particularly in terms of the 'close knit' school community:

I *What has been your experience of Gaelic medium education? Has it kind of met up to your expectations?*

M6 And far exceeded them. We had all these benefits that we wanted. . . . The thing I particularly love about it, and it is something that certainly in my school days I had never seen, just how close knit the school is in just about every respect.

One Edinburgh parent whose children were now in secondary school spoke very positively of her family's experience but suggested that the dynamics were changing somewhat with the growth of the school:

F6 When it was Tollcross Gaelic medium we just had a fantastic time because it was so small and intimate and a huge sense of everybody pulling together and so on. And now it is much bigger down at Taobh na Pàirce.

Some parents raised concerns of different kinds, however. Some (e.g. F5, F7, M5) were unsure of the viability of GME at secondary level, however, either because of concerns about academic quality or the range of subjects on offer, and one (M7) expressed disappointment that provision for music was not as extensive as they had expected. One parent said that their experience of GME was 'overall, very positive' but expressed the view that the Edinburgh Gaelic 'school does not think clearly enough about children's rights and children's voices' (F5), partly due to its policy of using Gaelic as much as possible, even when children struggled to express themselves.

Parents had surprisingly divergent views of the extent to which the Gaelic schools in Edinburgh and Glasgow did enough to promote an awareness of Ireland and the connections between Scottish and Irish Gaelic. While one parent expressed the view that 'my kids come back knowing as much about Ireland as I do at this point' (M6), others felt that there seemed to be little interest in or attention to Ireland. However, parents disagreed substantially as to whether more should be done in this connection, with some expressing disappointment but others finding no reason why things should be different, as the following extracts show:

I *Does the school do much to promote a connection between Scotland and Ireland or could they do more?*

F1 I think more could be done. I think it is a hugely positive thing. In this day and age we have got the internet and I am not into technology but that is one time when it could be such an amazing experience.

I *Do you think the school here does enough to promote the Irish link, or could do more to promote the connection to Ireland?*

F12 I don't know if I would expect it to. I can't think of anything it does to promote the Irish link. Are there things?

I *I'm not sure. But should there be?*

F12 I don't think there should be. Unless it is . . . would it be of benefit to the kids, more of a language community?

Parents reported varying responses from their children to the experience of GME, and in many cases one child seemed to have a more positive reaction than another. It is difficult to discern a pattern here: in some cases the older child would be more positive, some the younger, sometimes a daughter more than a son, sometimes the reverse. One mother reported as follows:

F12 [My older daughter] isn't that into Gaelic. So she is only in P2, and I think having another one in P1 has made me realise it is different. She is not that enthusiastic about speaking Gaelic. Which is a shame obviously! I think obviously she must understand quite a lot, and I talked to her teacher, she does speak it when spoken to. With me, she will occasionally . . . if I am trying to talk to her in Gaelic she will talk back. But she definitely prefers talking in English and people talking to her in English. But my second is not like that. She is much more enthusiastic about the language.

Another parent found that her older child, a daughter, was more enthusiastic about GME than her son:

F11 She just loves it. She is absolutely fascinated by it. [. . .] She thinks it is the most enthralling thing she has ever come across. And my son is the complete opposite. No interest. It is a struggle. But it is a struggle with English as well.

The one interviewee who had learned Gaelic to fluency reported that she began Gaelic classes when her daughter was in the Gaelic nursery, but that she became 'frustrated' by her own linguistic limitations as her daughter grew older:

F7 Nuair a bha [mo nighean] aig 's dòcha Clas 3 no Clas 4 bha e follaiseach dhomhsa nach robh gu leòr Gàidhlig agamsa. 'S e dìreach bha mi caran frustrated. Bha gu leòr agam airson an obair-dhachaigh is rudan mar sin a dhèanamh ach bha . . . dhomhsa bha cuimhne làidir agam mu dheidhinn na cothroman a bha agamsa [air a' Ghaeilge] nuair a bha mi òg, dìreach a thaobh mo sheanmhair is m' athair, is bha mi smaointinn tha seo caran contrived, tha iad dìreach really a' bruidhinn Gàidhlig aig an sgoil is chan eil sin ceart agus cuideachd bha e follaiseach dhomhsa nach robh e ag obair. Tha e ag obair gu ìre ach chan eil e ag obair really mur eil an cànan aig an taigh agad cuideachd.

(When [my daughter] was maybe in Primary 3 or 4 it was obvious to me that I didn't have enough Gaelic. It was just that I was a bit frustrated. I had enough to do the homework and things like that but . . . for me I had a clear memory of the opportunities I had had [in relation to Irish] when I was young, in relation to my grandmother and my father, and I thought this is kind of contrived, they're just really speaking Gaelic at school and that isn't right and also it was obvious to me that it wasn't working. It works to an extent but it doesn't really work unless you have the language at home as well.)

This sense of frustration and limitation led this mother to make a more focused effort to acquire Gaelic, and she continues to use Gaelic consistently with her children. This high level of Gaelic usage, however, was unique within this parent group.

8. The Gaelic language learning experience and use of Gaelic

Almost all the parents in the study had made attempts at learning Gaelic, both formally or informally, with varying degrees of intensity and with varying degrees of success. One interviewee (F4) expressed the view that this pattern may not be typical of the wider group of parents at the two Gaelic schools, however, and that only those parents who are actively involved with the school or 'hooked in in some way' tend to make efforts to learn Gaelic. These learning activities usually involved classes of different kinds in Edinburgh or Glasgow but several had done An Cùrsa Inntigidh (the distance learning course offered by Sabhal Mòr Ostaig), some had attended the Family Learning Week at SMO, one had done a short Gaelic course at SMO specifically designed for Irish speakers and one a longer-term residential course at SMO. Some parents had been learning for five years or more but only one (F7) had achieved substantial fluency, although one other (M8) was making rapid progress with a view to teaching in GME. Some parents reported going to Gaelic classes when the children started school but discontinuing after a while because of the perceived time investment that was required, as the following example shows:

I *Did you ever try to study Scots Gaelic at all?*

F6 Yes, [my partner] and I went along to a class in the first ... when [our daughter] went to school I think, we went along to a night class [...] It was really good fun [...] [My partner] was really, really good at it. He picked it up really quickly [...] when we got to the end of it, the next thing was to get really stuck into it and immersed. And ... I just thought ok 'do I do this?' We were exhausted with two small children and I thought 'no, I won't' and so we didn't. We were happy to do a little bit but neither of us were thinking 'ok, let's really go for it'.

I *This is quite a few years ago?*

F6 Yes.

I *And you haven't come back to it?*

F6 I haven't had the interest [...]

This contrasted with other parents who are more strongly committed to learning the language such as the following example, in which both parents, both of Irish origin, are learning the language. The parent who was interviewed in the study reported taking advanced language courses in Gaelic, intending to go on to do Sabhal Mòr Ostaig's Cùrsa Adhartais. Her husband, although described as having less aptitude for language learning, nevertheless intends to engage in the process and invest time and effort in acquiring Gaelic. While the parent's own Gaelic is seen to be adequate for the moment, the expectation is that in the longer term, the child's competence in the language would increase, so higher levels of ability in Gaelic are seen

as a necessary part of keeping up with their children and not getting to the point, as this parent suggests, 'where the kids can talk to each other and we don't know what they are saying':

I *Thinking back about the choice of the Gaelic medium route, was your husband into it?*

F8 Yes, he was super-interested. Even though I guess he is not terribly good at learning languages and it wouldn't be his thing, he is I think probably feels more of an affinity with Irish than I do. His father ... he is retired now, his father worked for the GAA, Gaelic Athletic Association, was very involved in that and so I think that side of things maybe makes him feel a little closer to the Irish language than I would. So he was very interested [...] my husband intends to start the same course at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig next year, he is ... his company have a matched learning fund where you put money in every month and then they match that so he is saving up to pay for the fees to do that next year. I think it will be more of an ask for him, more of a commitment, because it probably won't come as easily for him. But he wants to do it for the same reasons, to be able to keep up with the kids, to not get to the point where the kids can talk to each other and we don't know what they are saying [...] I intend to do the next course, Cùrsa Adhartais, after. And I would like to go next summer to family learning week at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig so I'll just keep going I guess till I get to a point where I feel like that is as far as my brain is going to get.

I *Fair enough. Are you using what you have learned at home?*

F8 Yes, I talk to my daughter in Gaelic, quite a bit. She is very into the learning of languages. She is quite excited by it. She likes to speak Gaelic. She will often ask to read Gaelic stories at bedtime or to ask me what things are in Gaelic. So I am quite lucky that I have got someone ... we can help each other out. [. . .] So we do speak a bit at home. For a long time it was simple things. Close the door, put on your shoes. We are getting there. We are both ... because we are at similar levels so it is quite good and I think I am still just a wee bit above her but she is catching up so ...

For this parent, then, speaking Gaelic with their children at home was also a means of improving their own language skills and constituted a two-way learning process.

Another mother expressed similar reasons for making a serious effort to learn Gaelic, noting in addition that 'I would want a degree of involvement in my children's education which I think comes with supporting them in the language that they are learning in' (F12).

Some parents reported making sporadic use of the language, particularly for basic instructions to do with mealtimes, getting dressed and so on. For parents with children in more junior classes, use of Gaelic was also linked to homework, Gaelic songs and TV:

F4 He [son in P1] is doing his Fuaimean [learning Gaelic sounds] at the minute [...] I would say he is relatively confident around the language. He is not intimidated by it. He understands a fair bit of it. He obviously isn't fluent [...] it's a shame, if we had have planned it all I would have started learning it a lot earlier but we do speak a fair bit of Gaelic around the house. I am very good at giving him instructions. So in the morning it

is, like *Càite a bheil do chòta, cuir ort do bhrògan, faigh do bhaga-sgoile*, you know, that kind of thing. There is a fair bit of ... it may not be completely correct but it is ... there is a fair bit of, like, *ith do bhracaist*, and that kind of malarkey going on. So there is a bit of Gaelic in the home and that means that he is fairly cool with it and it didn't throw him out on day one of primary school. He had been to sgoil-àraich as well [...] I made an effort when [my son] was young to play more music that was in the Gaelic language. So we had Runrig on the car for a long time. He can sing loads of old Runrig songs for a child. What have I done to him? So I suppose I have increased my knowledge of the music scene. I have watched an awful lot more TV.

8.1. Linguistic similarities – 'getting by' on Irish

As discussed in section 5 above, Irish parents in the study did not report regular use or high levels of competence in Irish. However, hearing Gaelic spoken by their children in some cases revived their interest in the Irish language. It also seemed to allow them to engage more actively with their children's language learning through the identification of common ground between the two languages:

I *Would it be fair to say you don't really use Irish at all these days?*

F8 No. Every so often I will chat with my daughter about things that are similar. She will say something in Gaelic and I will recognise it as being very similar to Irish and say 'oh it is like such and such in Irish' but . . .

While parents sometimes draw on their knowledge of Irish as a means of helping children with reading or with their homework, there is also the realisation that while having an Irish language background can help, the pronunciation and vocabulary are often very different:

F9 I tried reading it [i.e. Gaelic] to her but I am probably saying all the words wrong. I don't even know what some of the words are because they are different.

I *Do you think having Irish will ...?*

F9 It helps [...]

Other parents spoke of their sometimes unsuccessful attempts to 'get by' in Gaelic by drawing on their linguistic resources in Irish. While communication can sometimes be established on this basis, more often than not parents report switching to English:

I *At the playgroup do you speak a lot of Gaelic? Or do the play leaders?*

F9 It is the play leaders who do it. I speak to the play leader as much as I can. Usually in Irish because I don't know where the differences are [. . .] I usually wait for them to say that they don't know what I am saying and then I will just say it in English.

Almost all the parents, even those who claimed to have a good command of Irish, found that while having a knowledge of Irish was helpful, learning Gaelic often turned out to be 'more difficult' (F11) that they had first expected, particularly in relation to speaking. One of the parents

(M5) commented that Gaelic had been described to him as ‘just Irish with a Scottish accent’, but like other parents, more especially less fluent ones, he soon found out that it was more difficult than he had first anticipated. As he said himself, ‘I probably a bit naively thought we could dance between the two and whatever but actually they are not that similar . . .’ Another parent commented as follows:

I *Did you find having Irish helped you?*

M6 Over the people that were literally starting and hadn’t done anything, it was quite advantageous. It is very advantageous in terms of knowing how to structure sentences. Where the verb goes and how yes and no kind of work in relation to all the other words and stuff. You have got quite an advantage in terms of vocabulary. Many of the words are the same. Or what I find is the word is spelt completely different but the pronunciation is the same. Or vice versa. And that is the confusing bit. So I find that hard.

Other parents also referred to differences in terms of pronunciation, even for basic vocabulary:

M2 I am just endlessly surprised by the variations. [. . .] Just enjoying learning bits of language and even the counting, the way the *aon* [Munster pronunciation] turns into *aon* which . . . it is almost like Scandinavians speaking Irish.

As M8 pointed out, learning the basics of Gaelic is not too difficult for an Irish speaker given the closeness in linguistic terms between the two languages. However, the task quickly becomes more difficult, as he found, when it came to dealing with terminological differences. This, he says, can be very discouraging when it comes to mastering the language:

M8 Nuair a [thosaíonn] tú ag foghlaim Gaidhlig agus Gaeilge agat, tá sé an-éasca ar fad, agus tú ag tosnú. Tar éis tamaill though, tá sé uafásach deacair mar, sin mo thuairim féin, tá thart ar [7]0% de na focail céanna idir Gaeilge agus Gaidhlig. Tá an syntax díreach mar an gcéanna, tá an [téar]maíocht rud beag difriúil, is féidir leat é a— figure it out, from all sorts of things— ah, an 30% sin, sin an fhadhb is mó. Is féidir leat a bheith mícheart 100% den ama má phiocann tú an 30% atá difriúil an t-am ar fad. You know, it’s very hard, you lose your misneach very quickly.

(When you start learning Gaelic and if you have Irish, it is very easy, when you are starting out. After a while though, it is terribly difficult because, this is my own opinion, more than 70% of the words between Irish and Gaelic are the same. The syntax is the very same, the terminology is a bit different, you can – figure it out, from all sorts of things – ah, that 30%, that is the biggest problem. You can be wrong 100% of the time if you pick the 30% that is different all of the time. You know, it’s very hard, you lose your misneach [courage]very quickly.)

Even in the case of fluent Irish speakers in the group, the differences between Irish and Gaelic sometimes prompt a switch to English because of a lack of confidence in their spoken Gaelic and in getting their point across adequately:

F2 It is more different to Irish than I thought. [. . .] I find written Gaelic quite easy to read, but I am very . . . I have no confidence in my spoken Gaelic whatsoever. If I phone the school I will do the first three sentences in Gaelic and then I will switch to English. I will do the token . . . you know, *chan eil [mo mhac] a' dol dhan sgoil an-diugh* and then I get stumbly, foreigner, that is what I feel like. I feel very foreign to the Gaelic.

M1 I thought I should be able to learn Gaelic very easily and that wasn't my experience.

Another fluent Irish speaker who had also become proficient in Gaelic talked about the way in which the closeness in linguistic terms between Irish and Gaelic was leading to a meshing of the two languages, neither of which he felt he now spoke well. He talks about the emergence of a pidgin language:

M8 I ndáiríre, tá saghas, you know, pidgin idir Gàidhlig agus Gaeilge atá agam anois. Tá sé deacair, nuair a théim abhaile, bíim ag smaoineamh go bhfuil mo Ghaeilge cailte agam, mar you know, bíonn daoine a rá 'what are you saying?', agus anseo bíonn daoine a rá dom an rud céanna.

(In truth, you know, it's a kind of pidgin between Gaelic and Irish that I have now. It's difficult, when I go home, I think that I've lost my Irish, because, you know, people will say to my 'what are you saying?', and here people say the same thing to me).

A number of parents also commented on the fact that their attempts to use Gaelic with their children were often met with resistance to what was perceived as 'incorrect' Gaelic or Gaelic pronounced badly and where mixing with Irish was not tolerated:

I *And is it ... having Irish do you think it would ... do you converse with him in Irish or Gaelic?*

F10 Mostly Gaelic that I know he knows. Or I might say some things in Irish. He [son] does correct me already.

Another parent (M5) told a similar story recalling that his children 'used to laugh at me, as [name of child] was getting on at school she used to laugh at me for getting stuff wrong. If it was in Irish it would sound funny. She would actually go "I don't understand."

While some parents said that Irish helped them understand the basics of the language required in the more junior classes, as the children got older and developed greater competence in Gaelic, they struggled to keep up:

- M2 [Since] the kids have been in the school, I found myself going back to [Irish] more and more as a way of understanding Gaelic. That is, they laugh at me now. It was very good in P1 and P2 and they were in the nursery before that. My Irish would get me by and to work out what the pronunciation would be. And now of course they are streets ahead. It has been more alive for me than it has for fifteen, twenty years. [. . .]
- I *Do you take an active role in [helping with homework] or is that more [your partner] that does that?*
- M2 I still try but it is more [my partner] because her language skills in Irish are so much better than mine. She can make the connections to the Gaelic more easily than I can. So with [our daughter], [she] is now in P6 so I struggle with the more complicated things [...]

While some parents, such as M3, reported that their children quickly developed a critical awareness of the relationship and differences between Gaelic and Irish, others, such as F13 reported that the children did not appreciate any distinction between the two languages:

- M3 The colour purple in Gaelic is *purpaidh* and we say *corcra* in Irish. So one day he [son aged 2] was doing the colours with . . . his teacher, and she said *purpaidh* and he said 'my dad says *corcra*', which was interesting. Because normally I think a kid would say 'my mum says *purpaidh*' or 'my dad says purple' because phonetically they are closer. But he realised that Gaelic must be closer to Irish Gaelic because he went the other way instead and he knew the difference, which I thought was quite interesting. He gets it, that these two languages are connected closer than the English. I was impressed with that. But then she had to say 'yes, ok, your dad says *corcra* but we say *purpaidh*.'
- F13 I don't think she really understands the whole Irish/Gaelic thing. I don't think she really gets that. I have said a couple of times 'you know, where granny and granddad live in Ireland, there is another language called Irish, very like Gaelic'. I don't think she has any appreciation of that.

9. Sociolinguistic perceptions of Gaelic

As noted in section 6 above, almost all the interviewees had minimal knowledge of Gaelic before coming to Scotland, or indeed of Scotland generally. Having spent time in Scotland, they described contrasting perceptions about how they thought Scottish people viewed the language, with some feeling that negativity to Gaelic was widespread but others observing increasing support and positivity towards the language, which they perceived as carrying less 'baggage' than Irish in Ireland.

Perhaps surprisingly, there were significant divergences in parents' perceptions of the current status of Gaelic in Scotland and public attitudes towards the language, with some viewing things much more negatively than others. One parent (M2) reported that 'the animosity you experience towards Gaelic is quite pronounced' while another (M1) perceived 'viciousness' and 'racism'

against Gaelic of a kind not fundamentally different from that seen in relation to Irish in the North of Ireland. In contrast, other parents reported not having detected any negativity, or indeed that there was much less negativity that was perceptible in relation to Irish in the Republic:

M8 I haven't got any bad reaction from anybody, saying you're mad, why are you sending your child to speak this minority language spoken only by sheep farmers in the Highlands? No, I haven't received that reaction. [. . .] I've not received any negativity from anyone.

M6 There is a negative feel towards Irish in Ireland that you don't get here. [. . .] I certainly don't want to go anywhere near referendums or anything but there is a nationalist element in Scotland that where you may or may not agree with people's choices, 'you learn Gaelic and you do Gaelic? Oh that is great'. I don't think that exists in Ireland. People would go 'you are learning Irish, that is a bit twee'. Ireland is really international. All over the world. America, Europe. We are in the middle here. We need to be a bit more fluid. We are the tech guys and we do all this and we need to stop with all the fiddling and the bodhrán playing. That is how people see us and we don't like that.

One parent from Northern Ireland found that Gaelic in Scotland was less divisive in political and sectarian terms:

F4 In Ireland the view would be if you are learning Gaelic [i.e. Irish] it is because you are Irish and you have got this republican view and all the rest of it. And in a way that would almost put me off it . . . And I think when it comes to Gaelic it is different because you have still got people of both religions speaking Gaelic so I don't see it as a particular thing that is linked into sectarianism at all.

Other parents reported suspicion or indifference towards Gaelic more than outright hostility:

F6 And since then, I meet various parents who say 'oh, where did your children go to school?' and when I say Gaelic medium there is always the question 'oh well, why?' and the lack of understanding, and these are from Scottish people living in Edinburgh. And I find that very interesting because, you know, I think a lot of parents, a lot of people from other countries, such as [parent's name] from Germany or [parent's name] from Spain or whatever, they can see the value of a multilingual, multicultural education whereas Scottish people don't see that, so they can't see it. And even when you explain your choice I know they are still looking at me vacantly thinking 'no, I don't understand that, why you would do that'.

I *Is that because they don't see the value of other languages or they have a particularly negative view of Gaelic or both?*

R I think because they don't have any connection with the language, they don't see the value of it, I think. Living in Edinburgh you don't, you don't see Gaelic around. You don't appreciate anything about it. And yeah . . . they've no connection. Maybe people who don't have any connection with the Highlands or anything.

In contrast, others saw the position of Gaelic as more favourable, and perceived a positive dynamic for the language at this time:

I *What are your impression of Gaelic now that you are more involved?*

F10 I find it really interesting. The kind of growth of it. The culture that it is trying to propose or promote. I find it . . . I think it is positive. A positive thing.

I *Here in Glasgow, how do you think people feel about Gaelic generally?*

M7 Generally very positive. Yes. [. . .] I imagine that everybody loves Gaelic in Glasgow. [. . .] I generally feel buoyed up and supported and encouraged and feel like I live in a Gaelic-friendly bubble. [. . .] So the whole Gaelic thing feels like the winning side.

Several interviewees expressed the view that the Gaelic community was too cautious, conservative or defensive, and that it should embrace change more enthusiastically:

F1 The Gaelic world needs to reach out and not hold on to just exactly the way things have always been. And were. And it is fantastic to value your traditions and all of that but we need to grow and change and I don't necessarily think that always happens. [...]
But I think a lot of people are very critical of other people's Gaelic. 'Is it nice Gaelic? Is it *blas* Gaelic [*sic*]?⁵ Is it from Barra? Is it from Uist?' And they pick up . . . even my own husband will pick up on the differences in the islands and not give credence and celebrate the fact that everyone is using Gaelic to whatever level they can. [. . .] I do think there is a slight snobbery with people that have had it a long time, that if it's not perfect it's not good enough. And I believe that it would be so good if you could say 'Madainn mhath everybody' and just start using it in phrases and a few words and mix it up with English and don't get it right. And take away the fear. But I think, a lot of people, even when they are learning it, want to have it perfect to use it. I don't think that is a healthy way.

F5 I think that Gaelic, Gaelic is being saved if you like by urban first generation Gaelic speakers and I think aspects of Gaelic have not caught up with that and redefining itself. What is it now to be a Gaelic speaker in Scotland? So although I feel it is really important to connect with where you come from, it is equally important to have a sense of where you are going to. And I think they [the school] could do more about that. They could do more about the aspirational trajectory of the language. [. . .] They seem to connect more with the old home sense of Gaelic.

F2 I think here at the moment there is fear around Gaelic, and the school losing, you know, its quality of Gaelic because there is more children at the school, it's expanding every year and that more of us are non-Gaelic speakers. [. . .] There is a bit of fear among parents, I don't know, about, oh, the language being diluted. Whereas I see the opposite, because when I was growing up [. . .] that was the start of the massive

⁵The intended meaning here was evidently 'does it have a nice *blas*?', i.e. does it sound rich or authentic.

proliferation of [. . .] of Gaelscoils, *naíonraí* [nursery] schools, infant schools, secondaries growing, so I [. . .] hope that what's happened in Ireland twenty, thirty years ago, is going to happen here and that's a healthy thing for the language if more and more people are speaking it and even if it changes, if it is the Glaswegian Gaelic growing, that is a good thing, that is a healthy thing, I would hope. And that's the Gaelic I hope I'm speaking by next year or the year after. You know, 'Chan eil scoobie agam'. I love it. This kind of funny [. . .] you know, it's modern, that's a language alive. Isn't it? When it's doing that. So . . . I would hope that is what is going to happen here. I hope my children are growing up speaking a language that is changing and adapting to the world around it.

10. Current connections with Ireland

All the interviewees reported that they returned to Ireland a few times a year for family visits, and a few also returned regularly for work reasons. However, interviewees expressed very different views concerning the possibility of returning to Ireland permanently. Some said they were settled in Scotland and did not envisage returning to Ireland. For them, Scotland was now their home:

I *And can you say what your plans are in terms of staying in Scotland?*

F8 Oh yes. Yes. This is home for us now. We have been here long enough that this is definitely home.

Several interviewees stated very firmly that they had no intention of returning to Ireland, as the following excerpts illustrate:

I *Would you ever think of returning to Ireland, or is that not realistic?*

M4 Absolutely not. I have no hankering after that. Not at all.

M6 There would be just simply no reason for me to go back [to Ireland].

I *Can you say at this stage that you plan to stay in Edinburgh or Scotland indefinitely or do you think you might go back to Ireland?*

F12 We won't go back to Ireland.

I *Quite definite.*

F12 We talked about this when we had [our son], you start having a family and you think about your family and being close to your parents and that all comes up. We talked about it. I would potentially have thought about it a bit harder but my husband was definite that he would not move back to . . . Ireland.

The decision to stay in Scotland permanently was often linked to having children, making the need to settle here permanently a priority in terms of 'putting down roots' for their sake:

I *Do you think you might ever go back and live in Ireland?*

F6 No. I think once you have kids . . . we have put down our roots here and we would have to start all over again. So no, we are here for the duration.

In other cases, the fact that their partner was from Scotland and more rooted there, provided the reasoning for staying:

I *Have you thought about going back to Ireland again?*

F1 Realistically because of job opportunities we did not [. . .] But whoever knows. In the long term. But I think I see whilst the children are in education, and my husband is quite grounded here in Scotland. I think I am more flexible.

In certain cases, having started school and in particular GME acted as a type of 'anchor'. This may be linked to sense of community that GME some parents spoke about and which seemed to create a sense of belonging for them:

I *Do you think you will be based in Scotland indefinitely now? Do you have any plans to move on?*

M7 . . . Do I think I will be based in Scotland? What do I think about this? I don't know. Probably. And actually the kids going to the Gaelic school strangely is a big anchor somehow. . . . I would feel sorry to take them away from it at this point. Very sorry.

Moving was therefore seen as something that would not only interrupt their children's schooling but also the affinity they had developed for Gaelic:

I *Why would that be?*

M7 Why? I think they are happy there and they like it and I quite ... I really like the idea that they are going to learn Gaelic and they will have Gaelic.

While none of the interviewees indicated that they hoped or planned to move back to Ireland in the short or even medium term, partly due to concerns about interrupting their children's schooling, several held this out as a longer-term possibility. This tended to be the case when both parents were from Ireland and had no family support in Scotland. As noted above, several parents identified among their reasons for choosing GME the potential usefulness of Gaelic in helping the children taking up Irish at a later stage should the family return to Ireland. Although the parent in the following example had no immediate intention of moving back to Ireland, the possibility remained. She was aware that Irish was a subject that the children would have to do at school and saw their knowledge of Gaelic as a means of learning Irish:

F11 I would say we are here for the foreseeable I would say.

I *It is not looking for the first opportunity ...*

F11 We do look. I would be lying . . . if I said I particularly look but [my partner] does as well. We have no family at all in Scotland, apart from our kids [. . .] at this stage, it looked as though we weren't going back home anytime soon, it would make them more rooted here. I suppose there was also the thing that we thought, 'maybe we will go back home'

and if we will, the kids will have to do Irish in school and this might help them, if that would happen, this would help them, if they had this knowledge of Gaelic.

Similarly, another father observed as follows:

F2 [A] second practical reason [for GME] would be is that we would hope to move back to Ireland, and I imagine for my kids, given that it is compulsory in Ireland to learn Irish, therefore if we move back in a few years, that it would be easier for them language wise to pick up Irish. [...]

Other parents shared this view, recognizing the utility of Gaelic if their children needed to learn Irish and integrate into the Irish school system. Many parents perceived Irish as an important part of the Irish school curriculum and as something that their children would need to learn if they returned to Ireland. This is likely to be based on their own experience with the Irish education system in which Irish would have been a compulsory subject during their thirteen years in the school system. Having a background in Gaelic was thus seen as a way of helping the children's education transition. While Irish is normally compulsory in primary and post-primary schools in the Republic of Ireland, students for whom primary education up to 11 years of age was received in Northern Ireland or outside the Republic are exempt. Interestingly, however, almost none of the parents we spoke to showed any awareness of this:

F10 It is always in the back of my mind, if we ever did move back to Ireland, he wouldn't perhaps be totally at a loss, if he was moving at an older age to a different school.

F2 But a second practical reason would be is that we would hope to move back to Ireland, and I imagine for my kids, given that it is compulsory in Ireland to learn Irish, therefore if we move back in a few years, that it would be easier for them language wise to pick up Irish.

Outside of the purely instrumental value of Gaelic as a stepping stone to learning Irish, some parents highlighted the value of GME and learning Gaelic in forging connections between the children's grandparents in Ireland:

I . . . *and do your children have much awareness of the link between Irish and Gaelic?*

M5 They do. They think ... [name of child] has probably done a little bit of chatting to my mam. My mam as well probably earlier on felt it was too much of a leap [between Irish and Gaelic] But I think now she is getting a bit more into it. She will still speak Irish but she will see the kids' reading books and realise that she can understand it.

Parents gave divergent reports of their perception of their children's relationship to Ireland and their sense of identity. One mother (F6) said that her children felt 'very positive' about their connection to Ireland and definitely thought of themselves as being Irish in some sense and another that her children 'have a very strong connection with Ireland' (F12), but another reported that her children saw themselves as firmly Scottish:

I *How would you see their connection to Ireland? Do they have an Irish identity?*

F2 They don't have any dewy-eyed Irish notions. My [son] is very clear that he is from Scotland and if we are playing football, I have to be from Ireland and he has to be from Scotland and he doesn't want to play for the Irish team.

But another parent (M4) described his children as 'ambivalent' in relation to Ireland, and another (F4) that her son 'knows that, like, he has got this dual identity to a certain extent'.

Finally, only a very small number of the interviewees reported that they knew a lot of other Irish people in Scotland, except other parents at the school, and almost none reported any involvement in any Irish cultural activities (e.g. traditional music). There was also very little awareness of cultural initiatives to promote links between Irish and Scottish Gaelic, such as colmcille or the Glasgow-based Gaels le Chèile.

11. Conclusions

This research yielded rich and diverse data and provides a basis both for additional investigation and practical measures of different kinds. From a research perspective, this research is helpful in confirming and amplifying previous findings concerning parental choice of GME and the range of relevant motivations. By focusing on a distinct sub-set of parents, this project also prepares a path for similar investigations, perhaps focusing on parents from other countries or other cultural backgrounds (including parents who are 'new speakers' of English). This project had also shed new light on parents' Gaelic learning trajectories (including the obstacles and blockages they have encountered) and the dynamics of family language learning.

In practical terms, this research demonstrates that specially tailored learning materials or courses for parents with a knowledge of Irish would be very beneficial, allowing Irish parents to focus on key points of difference. Short courses for Irish speakers are offered by Sabhal Mòr Ostaig but these have limitations: they require travel to Skye or Islay, they usually run only one week a year and they require advanced competence in Irish.

Another suggestion advanced by several parents was the possibility of strengthening links to Ireland and Irish. While some initiatives and exchanges are already in place, more might be done to increase GME pupils' awareness of the cultural links between Scotland and Ireland and to build connections between the Gaelic and Irish communities in Scotland. As noted, however, not all parents saw particular value in this approach.

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge Soillse's award of a Small Project Grant which made this research possible. We would also to thank Katherine Forsyth, Will Lamb, Alison Ní Dhorchaidhe and Sarah Scott for their help publicising our research, Fiona MacDougall and Lesley Scullion for transcribing interviews, Stuart Dunmore for data coding and Gavin McLean for additional coding and analysis. We are especially grateful to all the participants in the research who gave their time and helped us locate additional participants.

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