

Measuring teacher support for standardised assessment in Gaelic Medium Education

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Project summary

Assessment is essential in education to gain an understanding of pupils' progress. The introduction of new assessment orientated policy in 2016 marks a significant change in Scottish education as it will establish national testing to evaluate educational performance and attainment. The potential impact of these developments was the main focus of the project and achieved by exploring teachers' perspectives regarding national assessment policy developments. A focus on Gaelic medium education was adopted as these teachers have had considerable autonomy given the lack of specific resources available to them for assessment and measuring pupil progress.

Rationale

There is a recognised need for resources in Gaelic medium education and this includes assessment based materials. The roll out of statutory national level assessments makes this a pressing issue to consider given that little is documented in research about what GME teachers perceive about assessment and its place in the classroom.

Research process and participants

Focus groups were held during the annual conference for Gaelic medium teachers, An t-Alltan, in September 2016. At this event, teachers come together from a variety of authorities offering the researchers insight into different practice across Scotland. Thirty-one participants volunteered to take part and this allowed a range of professionals to be involved, whose breadth of experience contributed group discussions. This approach helped to gauge the different needs and perspectives of those involved within Gaelic medium education. Data was collected in a single session involving two separate group discussions with a facilitator leading each and an audio recording was made.

Findings and interpretation

Teachers and education professionals offered their insight and perceptions surrounding the introduction of the national improvement framework and considered the implications for teachers, schools and stakeholders. The broad ranging impact of the policy was discernible in the views shared by participants. Participants were keen to discuss the current climate regarding Gaelic medium education as well as more assessment specific issues linked to the implementation of national attainment assessments. There was a general consensus that the standardisation of assessments would bring a welcome consistency for Gaelic nationally in Scotland, as current practice seems to involve a more ad-hoc approach, with authorities sharing materials and assessments in an informal way; at present there is considerable variation across the 14 local authorities providing GME. Participants echoed agreement that assessment in education was valuable but cautioned for assessment to inform practice. The purpose and wider goals of the national assessments required clarification and were of particular concern.