

# **Mòr-ionad Gàidhlig do Dhùn Èideann?**

## **A Gaelic Hub for Edinburgh?**



# Plan for session

- overview: why a hub? what kind of hub?
- history in Edinburgh
- developments elsewhere in Scotland: Inverness, Glasgow, Stornoway, Uist
- developments in Ireland and Wales: much larger scale!
- paths forward . . .

# Why a hub? What kind of hub?

- provide a recognised 'safe space' to use Gaelic in Edinburgh – for learners and fluent speakers
- central base and gathering place – much Gaelic activity in Edinburgh, but no place to come together
- provide information about Gaelic, raise profile of Gaelic (to Gaelic speakers, Edinburgh residents generally, visitors to Edinburgh)
- services and facilities (e.g. cafe), space for events and activities
- scale depends on finance and community aspiration/commitment
- examples from elsewhere, especially Ireland and Wales

# Past proposals in Edinburgh

- (initiatives from early 1900s: Celtic Union etc; role of West End Hotel etc)
- Taigh na Gàidhlig campaign in late 1990s: well-developed plan to acquire building in Chambers Street
- extensive fundraising, much support from local/national Gaelic organisations, successful application for Lottery funding – but eventually unsuccessful due to change of view by Scottish Arts Council
- issue raised on multiple occasions since, e.g. at Coimhearsnachd Ghàidhlig Dhùn Èideann conferences in 2006 and 2007
- Iomairt Ghàidhlig Dhùn Èideann plans for shared facility in Sandeman House (near John Knox House) in 2012 fail
- but no concrete plan developed or feasibility study conducted

# **Ionad Gàidhlig Dhùn Èideann**

## **[www.ionaddhuneideann.org](http://www.ionaddhuneideann.org)**

- established in 2020 as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO)
- aims ‘to create, operate and maintain, on a charitable and non-profit making basis, a linguistic, cultural, educational and social centre for the benefit of the Gaelic community of Edinburgh and the Lothians and generally to promote, within that centre and elsewhere, the usage, learning, study and enjoyment of Gaelic’
- seven-member board, part-time development officer (since 2023)
- activities include fundraising/events for two flagstones in Makars’ Court, Pop-up Ionad, Latha Mòr; more planned for next year
- community survey launched today!

# Cultarlann Inbhir Nis

- as in Edinburgh, Gaelic hub under discussion in Inverness for some time
- current plans for centre via Alba Heritage Trust/Impact Hub > feasibility study
- survey in 2018 finds strong public support
- successful community publicity campaign
- recently purchased disused East Church (very near station) with support from Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Inverness Common Good Fund
- extensive (and expensive) refurbishment now needed to make space fully functional, for classes, children's activities, events, performances etc
- see interview with Maggie Mulholland on IGDÈ website



# An Lòchran, Glasgow

- Highlanders Institute, 1925-79 – not really a language centre
- An Lòchran established 2001, supporting
- different kinds of cultural activities as a
- ‘virtual’ centre
- based at An Lèanag in Partick (former Gaelic organisation offices)
- refurbished 2020 into large open-plan room (capacity ~30)
- previously had a development officer, now volunteer-run
- different kinds of activities: conversation groups, board games, hot desking, special events etc
- see interview with Fraser McRobert on IGDÈ website





# An Taigh Cèilidh, Stornoway

- small Gaelic cafe with cultural programme, opened 2023
- building purchased, completely renovated
- second building across street now being acquired
- private initiative (including crowdfunding), not grant-driven
- song and poetry sessions, different kinds of cultural events
- Scrabble Gàidhlig
- see interview with Teàrlach Wilson on IGDÈ website





# Cnoc Soilleir, South Uist



- different model, serving rural area with high density of Gaelic speakers
- not a full-time Gaelic centre; shared with UHI North, West and Hebrides (main user during term-time, overwhelmingly English-medium courses)
- beyond language, linked to Ceòlas music, dance etc courses and tourism agenda (connected to economic development)
- opened 2022; Phase II extension now planned
- £5.75m in Scottish Government funding (Gaelic Capital Fund), £1.1m from Highlands and Islands Enterprise

# Cultúrlanna in Ireland

- Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich in Belfast as the pioneer/flagship
- other centres in Derry, Carn Tóchar, Armagh
- Ciste Infheistíochta Gaeilge (Irish Language Capital Investment Fund): £8 million fund created in 2010 [specifically for community/cultural projects, not schools]
- progress in Republic more recently: government plans to support a major hub in central Dublin and upgraded network of language centres (building on existing centres in Carlow, Clondalkin, Ennis etc)

# Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich, Belfast



- opened 1991 in a disused church, renovated entirely by the community
- later given formal grant support, extended in 2010,
- classes, performances, wide range of events
- theatre, bookshop, café/restaurant, meeting rooms, exhibition space
- office space for Irish-language media, cultural organisations

# Cultúrlann Uí Chanáin, Derry

- developed from earlier, smaller language hubs in Derry (pop. 85,000)
- opened 2009, with grant of £4.6m
- facilities include theatre and performance space, cafe, teaching and training classrooms, business incubation suites and office space
- space for established language-related businesses and organisations



# Aonach Mhacha, Armagh



- population 16,000
- centre opened in 2020, at cost of £2.3m (£1.2m from NI government)
- hall/theatre, café, meeting rooms
- programme of classes and cultural events etc
- office space for language and community organisations



# Áras Chrónáin, Clondalkin (SW Dublin)



- Clondalkin designated as an ‘Irish language network’ under Irish language legislation – extensive education provision and community activity
- centre for Irish language and culture, established 1990
- regular programme of language and music classes, concerts, drama, other events
- bar, performance space, meeting rooms etc

# Language hubs in Wales

- many different kinds of language hubs in towns and cities across Wales, some established for decades
- 2014-16: Welsh Government Capital Investment Grant allocates £2.5m to develop 10 Welsh language centres
- strong link to Welsh for Adults agenda: Canolfannau Cymraeg aim to increase opportunities to hear and use Welsh



# Canolfan Soar, Merthyr Tydfil

- located in ex-industrial area with low proportion of Welsh speakers
- converted former chapel and hall, reopened 2011
- theatre, cafe, shop, rooms for meetings/hire
- base for local Welsh development agency (Menter Iaith)
- programme of classes, cultural events etc
- main income from theatre and dance group bookings, music lessons and use by community groups



## Research by Manon Elin James on Welsh language centres (2018)

However, it is possible to criticise the way that the Welsh Government established the new centres. A number of problems were highlighted, including lack of research, planning, support and guidance from the Government.

One of the main conclusions is that a single sum of capital investment from the Government to establish the centres does not offer sufficient support, and that permanent revenue funding is also needed.

The current situation puts pressure on the centres to ensure that they are self-sufficient, which could lead to greater emphasis on generating income at the expense of promoting the Welsh language.

It was specifically noted in the Government's guidelines for grant applications that revenue costs were not provided to cover creating a business plan, staff costs, feasibility studies or other operating costs.

The business model is therefore flawed as the grant funds the opening of the centres rather than supporting them in the long term.

# Research by Manon Elin James (2018)

1. **Asses the local need** and only establish Welsh Language Centres if there is local demand.
2. Empower communities to address the language situation by establishing a **fund for community enterprises** that would offer grants to collaborative and voluntary enterprises to organise events through the medium of Welsh.
3. **Use an existing building**, such as a pub, chapel, village hall or rugby club.
4. Before establishing more Welsh Language Centres, the Government should **undertake thorough research and detailed planning** on how they will work in the long-term.
5. **Provide long-term financial support** for the centres that have already been established.
6. **Safeguard the status of the Welsh language** by ensuring that the contracts with private businesses within the centres contain a strong language clause. The Welsh Government should be prepared to intervene in cases where those conditions are not adhered to.
7. Welsh Language Centres should resemble **Resource Centres for the Welsh Language**, which could operate as information hubs or 'one-stop-shops' for the language. Such centres would be a base for local Welsh establishments, with the organisations' officers working together to organise activities in the community outside of the centre.

# Future progress — key questions

What kind of centre?

- focus/emphasis (risk of diffusion)
- level of ambitiousness
- input from community survey

Partners/governance/management

Funding

- capital
- recurring

How to progress?

- next steps, issue of sequencing
- short lease as one possibility