

**British-Irish
Parliamentary
Assembly**



**Tionól Parlaiminteach
na Breataine agus
na hÉireann**

Committee D (Environment and Social)

Report

**Provision for Indigenous Minority Languages in the BIPA
Jurisdictions**

May 2023

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1. Background to the inquiry

1. The rich linguistic heritage of the BIPA jurisdictions is an important part of the culture of these islands, and comprises languages from six groups across four branches of the Indo-European family. The Insular Celtic languages of the Goidelic sub-group (Irish, Manx, Scottish Gaelic) and the Brythonic sub-group (Cornish, Welsh and Breton, spoken in north-western France) are the only remaining Celtic languages, their continental relations becoming extinct by the sixth century. The languages of Guernésiais, Jèrriais and Sercquiais, which derive from Norman French, are spoken in the Channel Islands, as is French. Scots, a close relative of English, is spoken in Scotland, and Ulster-Scots in Northern Ireland. Norn, related to Scandinavian languages, appears to have become extinct in Orkney and Shetland by the nineteenth century. Shelta is spoken by Irish Travellers, often as a means to conceal meaning from those outside the group, while Angloromani is a creole language based on English and Romani, used by descendants of Romanichal Travellers in the UK.

2. English remains the dominant language across the islands, with few monoglots speaking the other languages of the region. Until perhaps 1950 the use of languages other than English roughly coincided with the major ethno-cultural regions in the British Isles. As such, many of them, especially the Celtic languages, became intertwined with national movements in these areas, seeking either greater independence from the parliament of the United Kingdom, seated in England, or complete secession. The common history of these languages was one of sharp decline in the mid-nineteenth century, prompted by centuries of economic deprivation and official policy to discourage their use in favour of English.

3. However, since the mid-twentieth century there has been something of a revival of interest in maintaining and using them. Their respective Celtic indigenous languages are official languages of state in Ireland, the Isle of Man, Scotland and Wales, with equal status with respect to English. Since 2007, Irish has been a working language of the European Union, and since 2022 the derogation on the status of Irish in the EU has been lifted. The twentieth century and twenty-first centuries have seen the introduction to the

UK and Ireland of many languages spoken by immigrant communities. These languages face similar challenges to IMLs in their speakers' efforts to maintain language communities and ensure that younger generations continue to speak them.

- 5 4. One of the key Areas of Work of the British-Irish Council (BIC) is Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-used Languages, with this topic being added to its work portfolio at the June 2002 BIC summit. In addition to regular officials' meetings, the work sector has organised seminars for policy-makers and practitioners to help share good practice among people who work in the indigenous minority language (IML) sector. Each seminar and webinar focuses on a different area of the work sector's remit. The most recent webinar took place in June 2021, and the BIC has published phrase sheets, factsheets and a Spotify playlist with IML songs.¹
- 10
- 15 5. Cornish, Guernésiais, Jèrriais and Sercquiais are less well supported than other languages. Of the four, only Cornish is recognised officially under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Guernésiais and Jèrriais are recognised as regional languages by the British and Irish governments within the framework of the British-Irish Council.
- 20 6. Scots is similarly recognised by the European Charter and the British-Irish Council, and Ulster-Scots was deemed "part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland" under the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement. However, Scots is without official status as a language of state in Scotland, where English is used in its place.
- 25 7. Indigenous minority languages play a significant role in the society, culture and economies of the BIPA jurisdictions, but face different challenges. The Environment and Social Committee began an inquiry into provision for the languages and their speakers across the islands. The Committee concluded that such an inquiry would play to BIPA's strengths in enabling the jurisdictions to learn from each other. Too often in
- 30 these islands language has been a source of division, but in underlining the shared

¹ [Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-Used Languages | British-Irish Council \(britishirishcouncil.org\)](https://www.britishirishcouncil.org/indigenous-minority-and-lessor-used-languages)

experiences of indigenous minority languages this report seeks to demonstrate how they bind our communities.

5 8. The inquiry began with an evidence session on provision for Welsh that took place at the Senedd in June 2019. Soon after, the UK, and then Ireland, held general elections, delaying further planned evidence sessions. With the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic the Committee investigated whether it could take evidence online, but it proved too difficult to provide simultaneous interpretation. The inquiry therefore resumed when conditions allowed; the Committee heard from experts on Scottish Gaelic and Scots at the Scottish Parliament in May 2022. An evidence session on Irish in Dublin was postponed due to the death of her late Majesty the Queen; evidence-taking began again at the Oireachtas in January 2023, followed by a session at Stormont on Irish and Ulster-Scots in early March. Simultaneous interpretation was provided in each case. The Committee visited the Jersey Museum in May 2023 to learn more about the status of Jèrriais.

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20 9. Given this long timeframe, wherever relevant the evidence cited in the report has been updated to ensure that it still reflects the situation of IML provision in the BIPA jurisdictions. The Committee also requested written evidence on Manx, Cornish, Jèrriais and Guernésiais.

25 10. BIPA's wide remit enables this report to offer a comprehensive analysis of IMLs in the UK, Ireland and the Crown Dependencies. Though in its scope it draws on the recent work on IML policy carried out by the British-Irish Council, in the range of witnesses that it heard from (listed below) the report provides a more detailed assessment than has been attempted elsewhere. The Committee is very grateful to all witnesses for their evidence.²

² The Committee was very sorry to hear of the sad passing of Aled Roberts, Welsh Language Commissioner, whom we met in June 2019. We send our condolences to all who knew him.

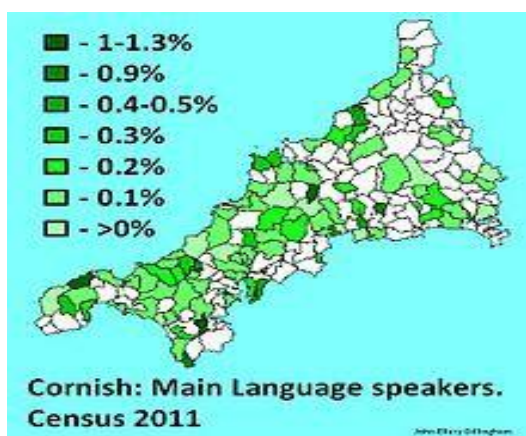
Status of indigenous minority languages

Cornish

11. Cornish is a revived language, having become extinct as a living community language in Cornwall at the end of the eighteenth century. However, knowledge of Cornish, including some speaking ability, continued to be passed on within families and by individuals, and its revival began in the early twentieth century.

12. The latest UK Census gives 567 main-language speakers of Cornish. This number is, however, believed to be an underestimation of the language's total speakership since it does not count second-language speakers and speakers within the diaspora. Taking these groups into account, witnesses estimated that the number of speakers at all levels is close to 3,000 people.³ Other surveys within Cornwall (relying on self-selection) indicated that there were 300-400 advanced speakers.⁴

13. Speakers are naturally most concentrated in Cornwall, though there are significant minorities in cities across the UK, notably Plymouth, Bristol, London, and Cardiff.⁵



³ Jasmine Andrever-Wright, Council member, Kowethas an Yeth Kernewek

⁴ Mark Trevethan, Pennledyer Gonisogeth/Principal Culture Lead, Konsel Kernow/Cornwall Council

⁵ Jasmine Andrever-Wright, Council member, Kowethas an Yeth Kernewek

Guernésiais

14. Once widespread among the population of Guernsey, the introduction of English following the Napoleonic Wars and the posting of English-speaking soldiers to the island, as well as an increase of English tourism and immigration, began the decline of Guernésiais. With the German occupation of Guernsey from 1940 to 1945, Guernésiais suffered a further decline because children were evacuated from the island, which resulted in Guernésiais not being passed down from parents to children. By the time of the 2001 Guernsey census, only 2.2 per cent of the population at were fluent in in the language.

15. The Guernsey Language Commission estimates that 1,327 people, or two per cent of the population, speak Guernésiais fluently, while three per cent understand the language. However 934, or seventy percent of the 1,327 fluent speakers, are aged over 64.⁶

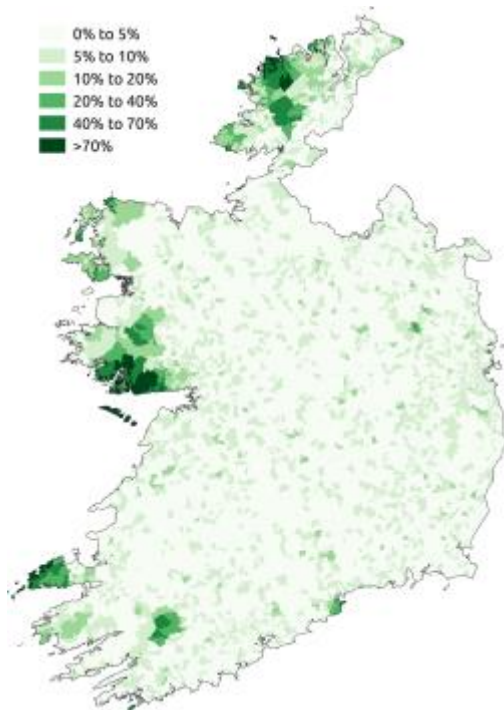
Irish in Ireland

16. According to the 2021 census, Irish Gaelic (Gaeilge nah Eireann) is spoken by 138,000 people as a first language, and by another 1,000,000 people as a second language.⁷ The Gaeltacht areas are recognised by the government of Ireland as areas where Irish is the predominant vernacular, or language of the home. The Gaeltacht districts were first officially recognised during the 1920s in the early years of the Irish Free State, following the Gaelic revival, as part of a government policy aimed at restoring the Irish language.

17. 2016 figures showed that the population of the Gaeltacht was 96,090, two per cent of the total population of Ireland, and a rise of 4.5 per cent from 2006. 63,664 of the Gaeltacht population were Irish speakers, i.e., 63 per cent. There are Gaeltacht areas in Donegal, Galway, Kerry, Mayo, Cork, Waterford and Meath. Outside these areas, Dublin and its suburbs are reported to be the site of the largest number of daily Irish speakers, with 14,229 persons speaking Irish daily, representing 18 per cent of all daily speakers.

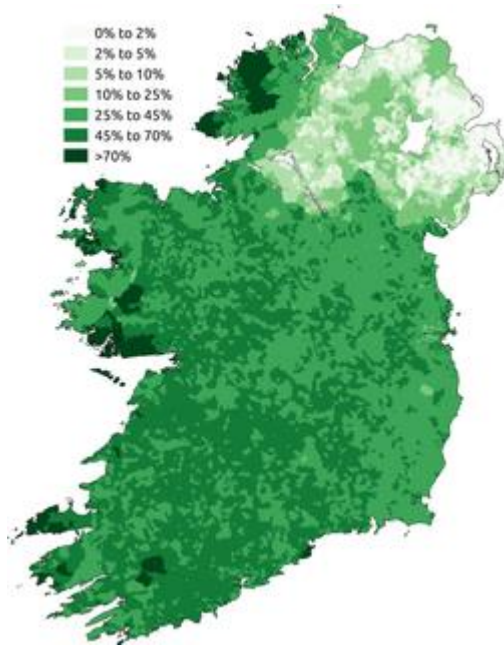
⁶ [About Guernésiais - Guernsey Language Commission](#)

⁷ [Irish Gaelic - MustGo.com](#)



Percentage of respondents who said that they spoke Irish daily outside the education system in the 2011 census in the Republic of Ireland.

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Proportion of respondents who said that they could speak Irish in the Ireland census in 2011 or the Northern Ireland census in 2011.

10

18. The Gaeltacht is threatened by language decline. Research published in 2015 showed that Irish is spoken on a daily basis by two-thirds or more of the population in only 21 of the 155 electoral divisions in the Gaeltacht. Daily language use by two-thirds or more of the population is regarded by some academics as a tipping point for language survival.

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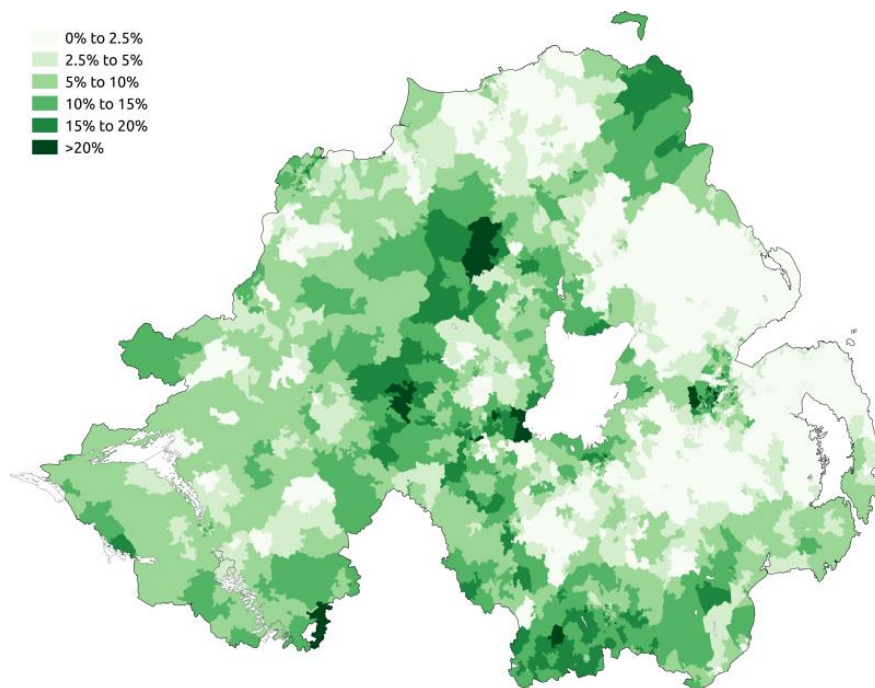
Irish in Northern Ireland

19. Irish received official recognition in Northern Ireland for the first time in 1998 under the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and, like Ulster-Scots, has since 2022 been an official language in Northern Ireland. The main dialect is Ulster Irish (Gaeilge Uladh). Protection for the Irish language in Northern Ireland stems largely from the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

10

20. In the 2011 census, Irish was the main language of 0.3 per cent of the population aged 3 and upwards, an increase from 0.2 per cent in the previous survey, while 12.4 per cent of the population had some ability in Irish, also an increase from previous census results.

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Proportion of respondents to the 2011 census in Northern Ireland aged three and above who stated that they could speak Irish.

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Jèrriais

21. Although few now speak Jèrriais as a first language, until the nineteenth century, Jèrriais was used as the everyday language for the majority of the population of Jersey; even as late as the beginning of the Second World War, up to half the population could still communicate in the language. The social and economic upheaval of the War meant that use of English increased dramatically after the Liberation. It is believed that the last monolingual adult speakers probably died in the 1950s, although monolingual speaking children were being received into schools in St. Ouën as late as the late 1970s.

22. Unfortunately, there are no recent statistics on language knowledge. The last survey by the government of Jersey was in 2012; a language question was not asked in the latest census in 2021. The figures below relate to the 2012 survey.⁸

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<https://www.gov.je/SiteCollectionDocuments/Government%20and%20administration/R%20JASS2012%2020121204%20SU.pdf>

Jèrriais

Fewer than one in a hundred adults in Jersey reported being able to speak Jèrriais fluently. Although over four-fifths (82%) could not speak any Jèrriais, one in eight (13%) could speak some common words and phrases.

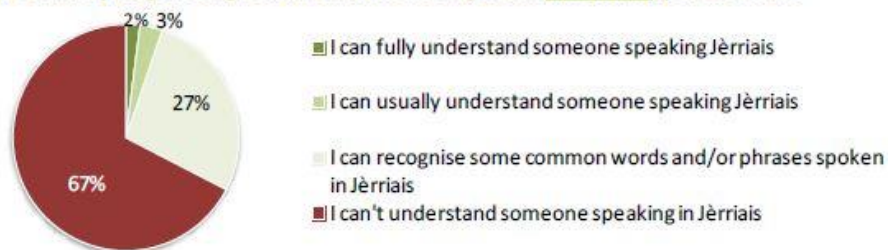
Figure 1.1 Which of the following best describes how well you can speak Jèrriais?



Older age groups were more likely to be able to speak Jèrriais, with 3% of those aged 65 or over speaking it fluently and an additional 4% of this age group able to speak 'a lot' of Jèrriais.

Whilst two-thirds of adults (67%) reported not being able to understand any spoken Jèrriais, a quarter (27%) could understand some common words or phrases.

Figure 1.2 Which of the following best describes how well you can understand spoken Jèrriais?



Very few people reported being able to write in Jèrriais (fewer than one in a hundred), although nearly one in twenty (4%) could write some common words or phrases. A third (32%) said they were able to read at least some common Jèrriais words or phrases.

Figure 1.3 Which of the following best describes how well you can write Jèrriais?

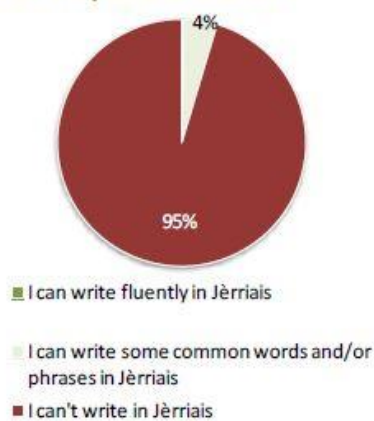
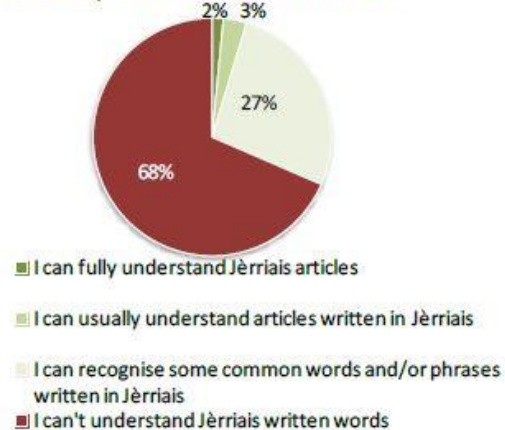


Figure 1.4 Which of the following best describes how well you understand written Jèrriais?



23. Although the highest number of Jèrriais speakers is in Saint Helier, the language has survived longest in the north-west and north-east parishes (Saint Ouën and Saint

Martin). It is likely that Saint Ouën still has the highest proportion of Jèrriais speakers. This, along with the strong influence of Saint Ouënnais writers, explains why the modern standard Jèrriais, as used in official signage and taught in schools, is a generalised version of the Saint Ouënnais dialect.⁹

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Manx

24. Manx began to decline as a community language in the nineteenth century with the advent of mass tourism. The Isle of Man was one of the first popular tourist destinations. At the peak of tourism at the beginning of the twentieth century, over 600,000 people visited the island each year, as compared to a local population of about 50,000. Today the island has about 80,000 residents and 120,000 tourists each year. Those working in the tourism industry were required to speak English; Manx came to be associated with poverty. Such attitudes, combined with emigration from the poor and remote areas where Manx was spoken most, contributed to its rapid decline within two generations. In a pattern reflected in many other places across the Gaelic-speaking world, the death of Manx produced typical households where the grandparents spoke only Manx, parents English and Manx bilingually, and the children only English.

10

25. In the nineteenth century, mirroring the revival that was taking place in Ireland, interest in Manx language and culture rose. Yn Çheshaght Ghailckagh, the Manx Language Society, was founded in 1899, and there was a renewed effort to record the speech of the dwindling native speaking community. Irish Taoiseach Éamon de Valera sent equipment in 1948 to record the last elderly native speakers of Manx. A modern revival began in the 1960s, but the death in 1974 of the last native speaker, Ned Maddrell, meant that Manx was declared extinct. However there has always been a small cohort of committed speakers and learners of Manx, who have contributed to recent efforts to continue the revival.

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⁹ Geraint Jennings, Offici pouor la promotion du Jèrriais, Héthitage d'Jèrri/Jersey Heritage

26. In the 2021 census, a total of 2,023 individuals out of a population of 84,069 (2.41 per cent) were recorded as being able to speak Manx, a significant increase of 21.72 per cent from 2011, when the equivalent figure stood at 1,662 (1.97 per cent). Somewhat higher numbers reported one or more language skills (speaking, reading or writing), with 2,223 in 2021 (2.64 per cent) as opposed to 1,823 in 2011.

27. Certain geographical areas contain concentrations of Manx speakers, in particular the town of Peel, which recorded a density of speakers of 4.55 per cent (260 out of 5,710 residents), perhaps reflecting its proximity to the Manx-medium primary school, and the town's long-standing reputation as a bastion of Manx culture. In contrast, only 1.88 per cent (294 out of 26,677 residents) in the island's capital Douglas were recorded as Manx speakers.

28. A new question in the 2021 census revealed 23 individuals claiming Manx as the "language mainly spoken at home" across twelve households, with an additional ten individuals across four households claiming to use a mixture of Manx and English. However, no questions on levels of fluency, usage or understanding were included. For example, 371 ten to 14-year-olds are reported as speaking Manx in the census, suggesting that parents may have over-estimated the language ability of children who have learned introductory Manx as a school subject. The numbers of speakers with higher levels of fluency probably number 300–500. Almost all are second-language speakers who have learnt the language through formal education, adult classes or self-learning. A handful of children over the last 40 years have been raised with Manx in the home, although all are dominant English speakers. In 2022, the Manx Language Strategy recorded 1,842 pupils as attending lessons in the island's schools.¹⁰

¹⁰ Christopher Lewin, Scrudeyr/Secretary, Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh/Manx Language Society

ISLE OF MAN

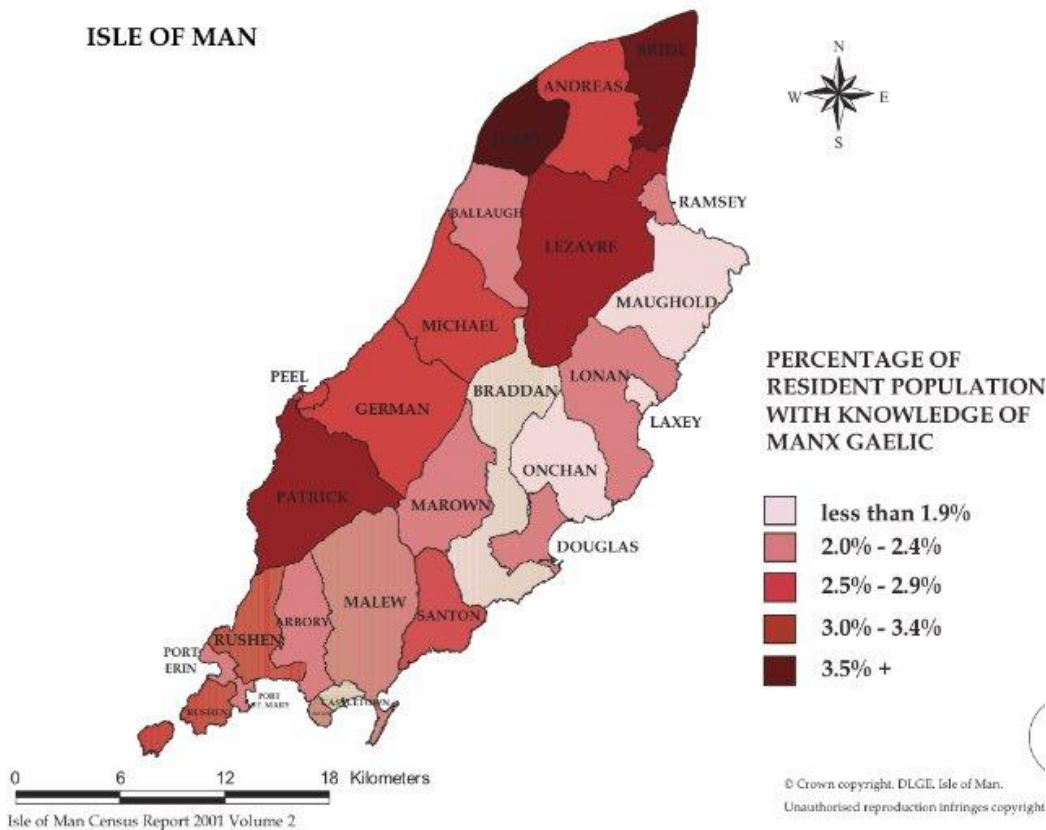
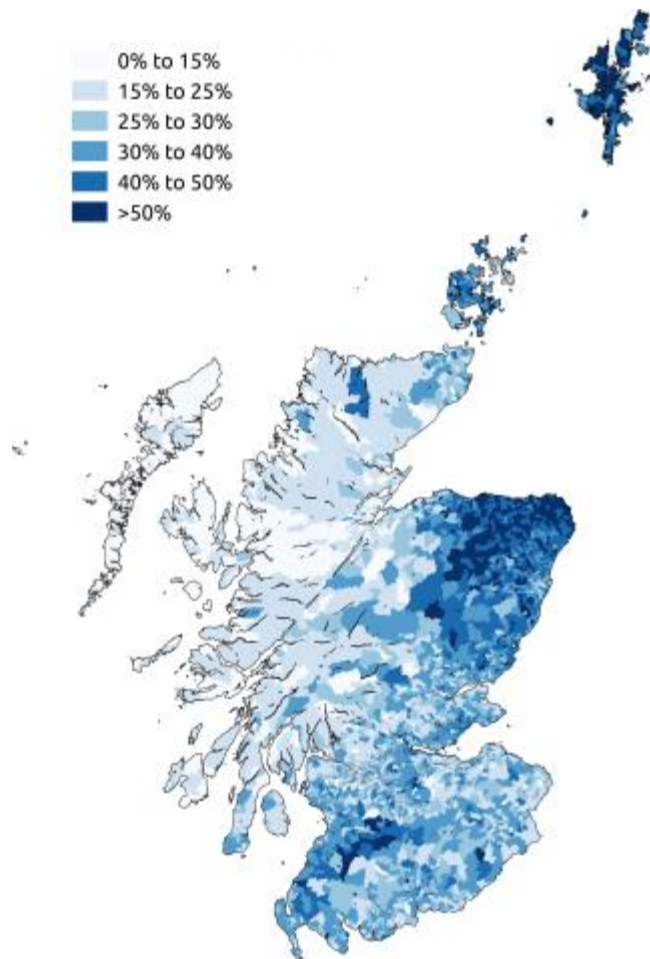


Figure 2: Isle of Man: Percentage of Resident Population with Knowledge of Manx Gaelic (2011) (Isle of Man Census report 2011, volume 2, page 37, available at: <https://www.gov.im/media/207874/2001censusreportvolume2.pdf>).

Scots

29. The use of Scots has been declining for some time; however the rate of decline has
 5 slowed in recent years.¹¹ Until relatively recently, clear figures on Scots speakers were
 not collected. The 2011 UK census was the first to ask residents of Scotland about Scots.
 Of approximately 5.1 million respondents, about 1.2 million (24 per cent) could speak,
 read and write Scots, 3.2 million (62 per cent) had no skills in Scots and the remainder
 had some degree of skill, such as understanding Scots (0.27 million, 5.2 per cent) or
 10 being able to speak it but not read or write it (0.18 million, 3.5 per cent). In Scotland,
 Scots is spoken most in the Scottish Lowlands, the Northern Isles, Caithness, Arran and
 Campbeltown.

¹¹ [Scots - Languages - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)



Proportion of respondents in the 2011 census in Scotland aged three and above who stated that they could speak Scots.

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Scottish Gaelic

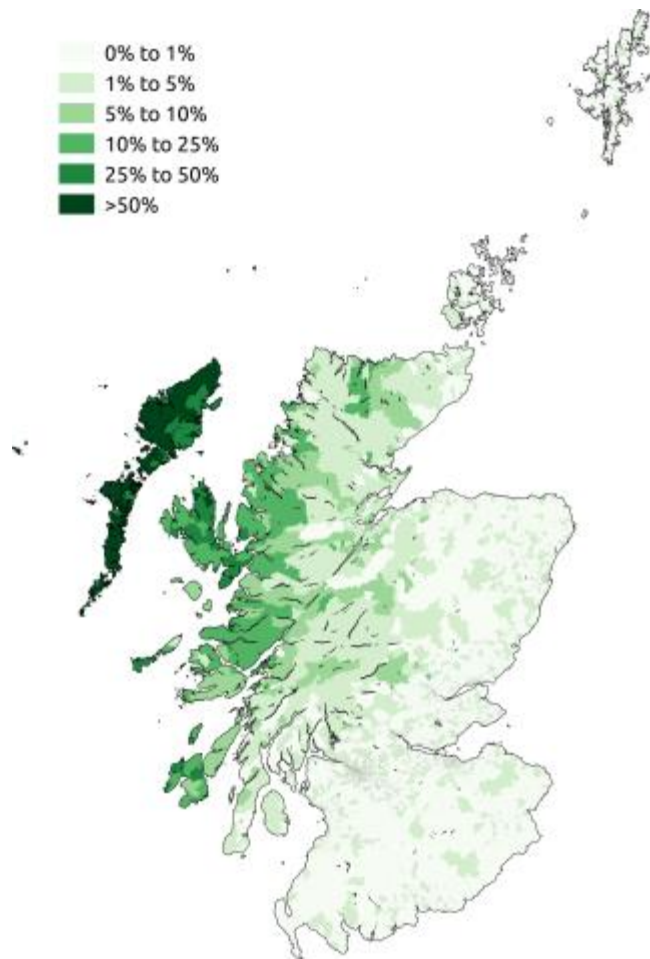
30. Economic and educational developments seriously diminished Gaelic in Scotland over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. English penetrated the Highlands and Isles through commerce and sheep-ranching. Particularly on the fringes of the Highlands, English words and accents began to ‘corrupt’ Gaelic speech; most people came to understand and use English in everyday life even if Gaelic remained their native tongue. Gaelic culture was largely non-literate at the time. English schools were established in Argyll in the late 1600s and in northern Scotland in the 1700s; Gaelic-speaking pupils were not taught their own language in school until the early 1800s. In 1872 Scotland moved for the first time to a compulsory, state-directed and state-funded system of education covering the entire country, but no provision was made for Gaelic.

31. Economic dislocation of Gaels began in the early 1700s, with Gaelic migrants leaving the Highlands and Isles for elsewhere in the United Kingdom, Australia and America. The first reliable statistics on the prevalence of Gaelic in Scotland begin in the 1690s. At that time around 25 to 30 per cent of the country spoke Gaelic. By the time the first census of Scotland asked the population about its ability to speak Gaelic in 1881, that figure was six per cent.

32. The number of speakers continued to decline over the twentieth century, but results from the 2011 Census showed that the decline has slowed since 2001. The total number of people recorded as being able to speak and/or read and/or understand Gaelic was 87,056. Of these, 58,000 people (1.1 per cent of the population) aged three and over in Scotland were able to speak Gaelic. This is a slight fall from 59,000 (1.2 per cent of the population) in the 2001 census, which compares favourably to the previous census results which recorded an 11 per cent drop in speakers. In total, there was a 0.1 percentage point increase in Gaelic speakers between 2001 and 2011 for the 3-19 age range.

33. Gaelic speakers are spread throughout Scotland. Of those who identified themselves as Gaelic speakers in the 2011 Census the council areas with the highest proportions able to speak Gaelic were found to be in Na h-Eileanan Siar (52 per cent), Highland (five per cent) and Argyll and Bute (four per cent). There is also a high degree of urbanisation within the Gaelic-speaking community, with large numbers of Gaelic speakers living in Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Greater Glasgow and Inverness.¹²

¹² [Chapter 1 Introduction - Gaelic language plan 2022 to 2027 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)



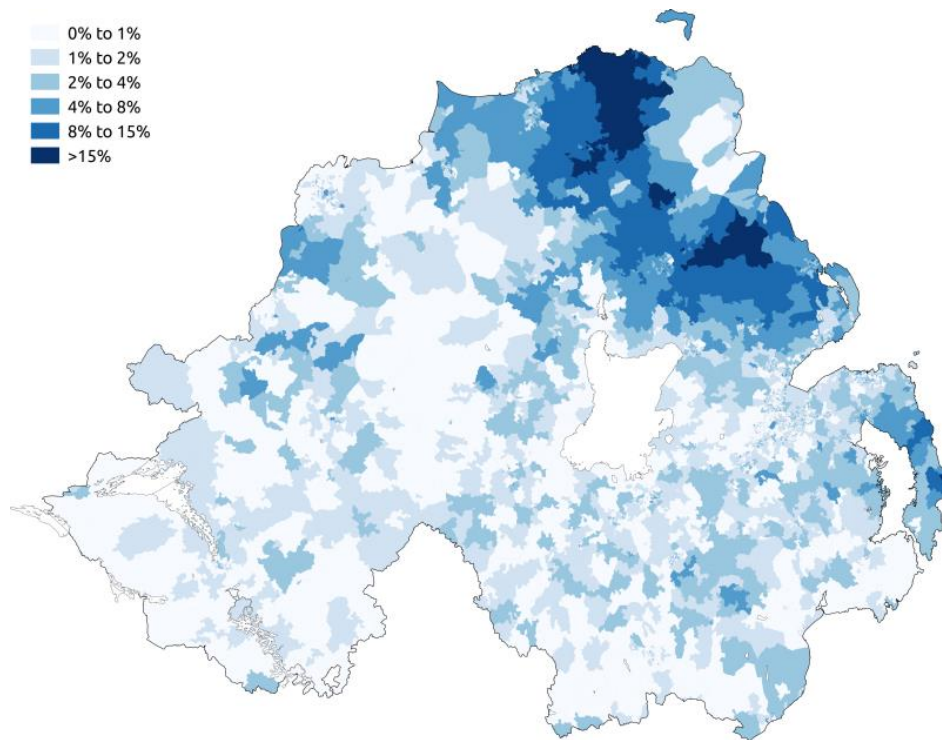
2011 distribution of Gaelic speakers in Scotland

Ulster-Scots

5 34. Ulster-Scots is the Scots language as spoken in parts of Ulster in Ireland. It is considered
 by some to be a dialect or group of dialects of Scots, although groups such as the Ulster-
 Scots Language Society, Ulster-Scots Academy, the Ulster-Scots Agency and the
 former Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure consider it to be a language in its own
 right. The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement gave recognition to Ulster-Scots as a
 10 minority language.

 35. The 1999 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey found that two per cent of Northern
 Ireland residents claimed to speak Ulster-Scots, which would mean a total speech
 community of approximately 30,000. Other estimates range from 35,000 in Northern
 15 Ireland, to a total of 100,000 in Ireland (mainly the east of County Donegal). In the 2021
 census of Northern Ireland, 115,088 people (6.27 per cent of the population) stated that

they could speak, read, write and understand Ulster-Scots and 190,613 people (10.38 per cent of the population) reported having some ability in Ulster-Scots.



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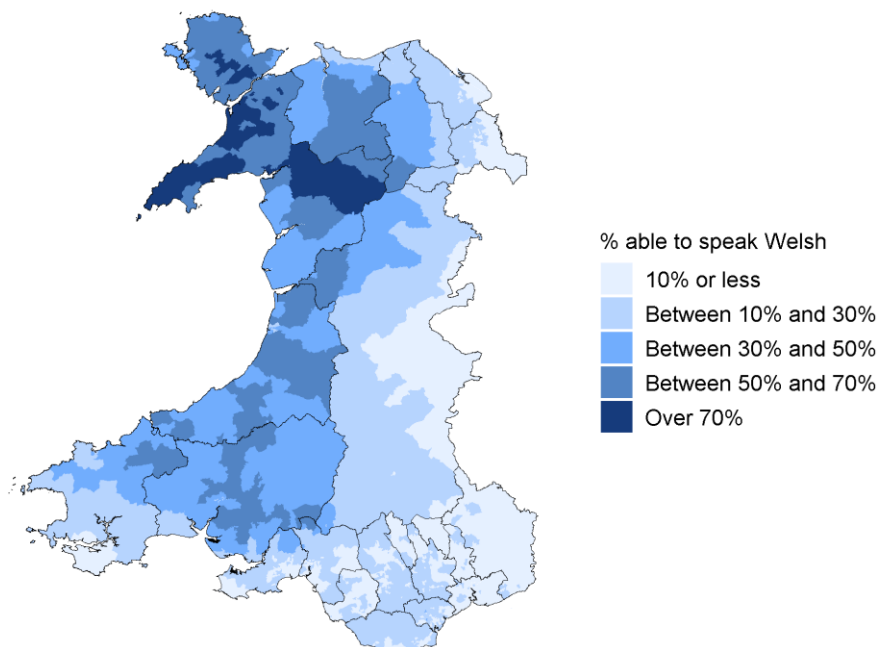
Proportion of respondents to the 2011 census in Northern Ireland aged three and above who stated that they could speak Ulster-Scots.

Welsh

10 36. A question about Welsh language ability has been included in the census in Wales since
1891. In 1921, a little under a million people aged three years or older were able to speak
Welsh in Wales (922,100 people). This number decreased over the last century, reaching
a low of around 503,500 in 1981. The population of Welsh speakers increased between
1981 and 2001, but has since decreased again. On census day, 21 March 2021, an
15 estimated 538,300 residents of Wales aged three years or older were reported as being
able to speak Welsh. This is around 17.8 per cent of the population in Wales, and
represents a decrease of around 23,700 people since the 2011 census, or a decrease of
1.2 percentage points. Despite the introduction of the Welsh government's language
strategy (see below), the number of Welsh speakers in Wales has continued a downward

trajectory begun in 2001. One of the reasons for this decline could be found in the disruption caused to Welsh-medium education by the global COVID-19 pandemic.¹³

37. The highest estimated numbers of Welsh speakers are found in Cardiff (94,200),
5 Carmarthenshire (90,900) and Gwynedd (88,400); the lowest are in Blaenau Gwent
(9,800) and Merthyr Tydfil (12,700). The highest estimated percentages of Welsh
speakers can be found in Gwynedd (74.2 per cent) and the Isle of Anglesey (62.8 per
cent); the lowest estimated percentages are in Blaenau Gwent (14.5 per cent),
10 Monmouthshire (17.3 per cent) and Torfaen (17.6 per cent).



Percentage of people aged three years or older able to speak Welsh, by local authority, 2021¹⁴

¹³ [Number of Welsh speakers has declined – pandemic disruption to education may be a cause | Bangor University](#)

¹⁴ [Welsh language in Wales \(Census 2021\) | GOV.WALES](#)

2. The political and legal status of indigenous minority languages

38. The previous section demonstrated the varying fortunes of IMLs in the BIPA jurisdictions in terms of the numbers of speakers of each language. The rest of the report will consider the policy frameworks that aim to support IMLs.

39. There are significant differences in the legal status of IMLs across the BIPA jurisdictions. Irish has a constitutional status as the national and first official language of Ireland.¹⁵ Provision for the language there is underpinned by the Official Languages Acts 2003 and 2021, which are intended to promote the use of Irish for official purposes in the State and set out the duties of public bodies in relation to the official languages of the State (Irish and English).¹⁶ The Coimisinéir Teanga (Language Commissioner) is an office created by the 2003 Act to promote and safeguard the language rights of Irish and English speakers in Ireland. Irish may be used in any proceeding of the Oireachtas, and the Irish language is prioritised in the Dáil and Seanad during Seachtain na Gaeilge, a two-week long Irish-language festival.¹⁷

40. Irish in Northern Ireland comes under the aegis of the Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act 2022. The Act established Commissioners on the Irish language and the Ulster-Scots/Ulster British tradition. It granted the Irish language official status in Northern Ireland and developed best-practice standards on Irish for public authorities. The Commissioner on the Ulster-Scots/Ulster British tradition will aim to develop Ulster-Scots language, arts and literature, and will promote Ulster-Scots services provided by public authorities.¹⁸ Both languages may now be spoken in the Northern Ireland Assembly, though because of the Assembly's current suspension, simultaneous interpretation services are not being used. The languages are supported and protected by two North-South bodies, Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency, which were

¹⁵ [The Irish Constitution \(citizensinformation.ie\)](https://citizensinformation.ie/en/life-in-ireland/official-languages/the-irish-constitution)

¹⁶ [gov.ie - Official Languages Act \(and related legislation\) \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie/en/publications-and-statements/publication-official-languages-act-and-related-legislation/)

¹⁷ [Irish in the Oireachtas – Houses of the Oireachtas; Irish language debates at the top of Government agenda for Seachtain na Gaeilge - MerrionStreet](#)

¹⁸ [Identity and Language \(Northern Ireland\) Act 2022 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/12/section-1)

founded under the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and report to the North-South Ministerial Council.

5 41. In Scotland, provision for Scottish Gaelic is regulated by the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005. The aim of the Act is to secure the status of the Gaelic language as an official language of Scotland with equal status to English.¹⁹ Gaelic language policy is driven by the Gaelic Language Board (Bòrd na Gàidhlig) rather than by the government. The Board oversees the production of statutory Gaelic Language Plans every five years. Since the passage of the Act a number of national-level plans have
10 been introduced, the most recent covering 2022 to 2027.²⁰ Previously plans included high-level targets, but more recent plans have not. Professor Wilson McLeod, Professor of Gaelic at the University of Edinburgh, considered that the inclusion of a target number of language speakers (as the Welsh government has done – see below) would be helpful in ensuring accountability, though targets would need to be realistic and well-
15 planned.²¹

20 42. There is no equivalent legislation for the Scots language, though the Scottish government has published a Scots Language Policy²² and consulted on a possible Gaelic and Scots and Scottish Language Bill.²³ Scots and Gaelic may both be used in the Scottish Parliament with the agreement of the Presiding Officer.²⁴

25 43. The Channel Islands have adopted policies to support their IMLs. The promotion of Jèrriais is underpinned by the Jèrriais Language Strategy 2022 to 2025. The strategy has the aim of adopting Jèrriais as an official language, implementing bilingual branding and funding the expansion of the Jèrriais teaching service. Jèrriais may be used, alongside English and French, in the Jersey States Assembly. The government of

¹⁹ [Gaelic Language \(Scotland\) Act 2005 - Google Search](#)

²⁰ [Gaelic language plan 2022 to 2027 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

²¹ Professor Wilson McLeod, Professor of Gaelic, University of Edinburgh

²² [Scots language policy: English version - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

²³ [Gaelic and Scots and Scottish Languages Bill: Scottish Government commitments - Scottish Government - Citizen Space \(consult.gov.scot\)](#)

²⁴ [559f76e1d8c84e97817dea5e900de8.ashx \(parliament.scot\)](#)

Guernsey made Guernésiais an official language in 2020.²⁵ Legal French is used in both jurisdictions' courts and in their assemblies, but this is a separate language from the islands' IMLs.

5 44. The Isle of Man government's Manx Language Strategy 2022-2032 aims to more than
double the number of Manx speakers.²⁶ Certain proceedings in Tynwald are conducted
in Manx and English; if a Member uses Manx Gaelic in debates, the President may call
upon the Member for a translation.²⁷ While Cornish gained recognition in 2014 as a
10 minority language under the European Framework Convention on the Protection of
National Minorities, it plays no legal or political role in the county.

45. Wales has a well-established legal framework for the promotion and protection of the
Welsh language. The 1993 Welsh Language Act put the Welsh language on an equal
15 footing with the English language within Wales. It established the Welsh Language
Board (Bwrdd yr Iaith Gymraeg) with the duty to promote the use of Welsh and ensure
compliance with the Act, obliged all public sector organisations providing services to
the public to do so in Welsh and English and ensured the right to speak Welsh in court.²⁸
The 2011 Welsh Language Measure, passed by the Senedd, strengthened the stipulations
20 of the Act by establishing that Welsh language should not be treated less favourably
than English, created the procedure of issuing Welsh Language Standards, which put
Welsh language requirements on organisations and businesses, and created the office of
the Welsh Language Commissioner in place of the Welsh Language Board.²⁹

46. In 2017 the Welsh government published Cymraeg 2050, which aims for 1 million
25 Welsh speakers by that year.³⁰ Proceedings of the Senedd may be conducted in Welsh,
with simultaneous interpretation made available for all parliamentary business.³¹

²⁵ [CHttpHandler.ashx \(gov.gg\)](#)

²⁶ [Final MANX LANGUAGE STRATEGY 2022-2032 \(gov.im\)](#)

²⁷ [spfile \(tynwald.org.im\)](#)

²⁸ [Welsh Language Act 1993 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

²⁹ [Welsh Language \(Wales\) Measure 2011 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

³⁰ [Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers \(gov.wales\)](#)

³¹ [Standing Orders of the Welsh Parliament \(senedd.wales\)](#)

47. Legal protections of IMLs in certain BIPA jurisdictions have been the source of some political disagreements. In Northern Ireland, for example, the Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act 2022 Act was passed by the Westminster Parliament after attempts to pass similar legislation in Stormont encountered political difficulties due to disagreements over the status of Irish and Ulster-Scots.

48. The evidence that we heard stressed that IMLs share many challenges, and that the approaches used successfully to support languages have been adopted by others. Thus the Isle of Man government has taken its lead from languages with more numerous speakers in creating policies to revive Manx³²; we heard from Ian Crozier, Chief Executive of the Ulster-Scots Agency, that the links between organisations promoting Ulster-Scots and Irish in Northern Ireland were growing stronger. Other witnesses stressed the linguistic links across communities – we visited Turas, a successful Irish language centre established by Linda Ervine MBE in a traditionally Protestant area of East Belfast which stresses the Gaelic inheritance of all inhabitants of Northern Ireland, a point reinforced by Edel Ní Chorráin, Deputy Chief Executive at Foras na Gaeilge.³³ In Wales, the Committee heard that there is a cross-party consensus on efforts to grow the number of Welsh speakers, with the Conservatives, Plaid Cymru and Labour backing policies to promote the language.³⁴

49. Legal protection for indigenous minority languages and policies to support their growth have proved beneficial for IMLs across the BIPA jurisdictions.

50. Legal frameworks work best where they stress the shared cultural benefit to all communities of supporting IMLs and, in doing so, enable political parties to reach consensus on language policy. BIPA jurisdictions should be mindful of this message when drafting legislation to protect IMLs.

³² Robert Teare, Oaseir Gaelgagh/Manx Language Officer, Unnid Gaelgagh/Manx Language Unit, Isle of Man Department of Education, Sport and Culture

³³ Linda Ervine MBE, Manager, Turas; Edel Ní Chorráin, Deputy Chief Executive, Foras na Gaeilge

³⁴ Professor Diarmait Mac Giolla Chriost, School of Welsh, Cardiff University; Bethan Sayed MS, Chair, Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee, Senedd

3. The economic, social and cultural roles of indigenous minority languages

51. Indigenous minority languages are used by people across these islands in their everyday lives, meaning that they rely on services such as banking and utilities to be provided in their language. Areas with a high proportion of IML speakers, such as North and West Wales, the Gaeltacht areas and the Western Isles rely in particular on such services. We heard about ways in which public authorities and private enterprises might embrace the desire by speakers to use indigenous languages in the commercial sphere. Since 2010 Jersey banknotes have included an element of trilingualism, with denominations in English, French and Jèrriais. Businesses in Wales see a commercial benefit in providing Welsh-language services, as they are more likely to attract Welsh-speaking customers.³⁵

52. With ‘cost of living’ increases, people may come to rely even more on IML-medium services. This is especially true of Scots, where in some low-income areas there is a high proportion of monolingual speakers.³⁶ On the other hand, witnesses told us that economic pressures threaten the survival of languages. First-language speakers of Scottish Gaelic have left the Western Isles in search of economic opportunities, weakening the language community in its heartland.³⁷ On Lewis, the largest island, Gaelic speakers are now a minority.³⁸

53. Speaking an indigenous minority language strengthens and creates bonds between people, particularly in rural and remote communities. Older people, who may speak indigenous minority languages more than younger people, often rely on such bonds for socialising, help and support.³⁹ Scots speakers use their language frequently in social situations, helping them build connections.⁴⁰

³⁵ Bethan Sayed MS, Chair, Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee, National Assembly for Wales

³⁶ Dr Michael Dempster, Director, Scots Language Centre

³⁷ Professor Wilson McLeod, Professor of Gaelic, University of Edinburgh

³⁸ Iain Caimbeul, Research Fellow in Sociolinguistics, University of the Highlands and Islands

³⁹ Dr Michael Dempster, Director, Scots Language Centre; Professor Rob Dunbar, Chair of Celtic Languages, Literature, History and Antiquities, University of Edinburgh; Bethan Sayed MS, Chair, Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee, National Assembly for Wales

⁴⁰ Dr Michael Dempster, Director, Scots Language Centre

54. But such connections were weakened during COVID. The pandemic led more people to spend more time online, which may have had an effect on how language communities are maintained or how people learn indigenous minority languages.⁴¹ In Ireland, online resources in English were often easier to access than those in Irish, disincentivising use of the language.⁴² Yet it was also suggested that if IMLs are to survive they should adapt to new ways of socialising, including the development of online language networks.⁴³

55. We heard many examples of efforts to create social opportunities for speakers and learners of indigenous minority languages. Conradh na Gaeilge is a social and cultural organisation which promotes the Irish language in Ireland and worldwide. The Committee visited its headquarters in Dublin, where it had set up an Irish-medium bar, social space and bookshop. In Belfast we went to Cultúrlann Mcadam Ó Fiaich, a restaurant, gallery and community hub that promotes the Irish language. Efforts are underway to create Scottish Gaelic community hubs in Edinburgh, Inverness and Glasgow.⁴⁴

56. Radio and television play important roles in supporting indigenous minority languages. Irish-language programming has been a feature of TV in Ireland for a long time; TG4, an Irish-medium public service network, was launched in 1996. S4C has since 1982 provided free-to-air Welsh-language TV, and BBC Alba plays an equivalent role for Scottish Gaelic. In Belfast we heard about how Northern Ireland Screen supports programming in Irish and Ulster-Scots.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Professor Wilson McLeod, Professor of Gaelic, University of Edinburgh; Dr Michael Dempster, Director, Scots Language Centre

⁴² Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh, Cathaoirleach (Chairperson), Comhchoiste na Gaeilge, na Gaeltachta agus Phobal Labhartha na Gaeilge (Committee on the Irish Language, Gaeltacht, and Irish-speaking community), Houses of the Oireachtas

⁴³ Professor Wilson McLeod, Professor of Gaelic, University of Edinburgh; Michael Dempster

⁴⁴ Professor Rob Dunbar, Chair of Celtic Languages, Literature, History and Antiquities, University of Edinburgh

⁴⁵ Richard Hanna, Chair, Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund Committee, Northern Ireland Screen; Heidi McAlpin, Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund Executive, Northern Ireland Screen; Áine Walsh, Head, Irish Language Broadcast Fund, Northern Ireland Screen

57. Conradh na Gaeilge runs a radio station from the centre that we visited. Each week, a few hours of bilingual or Manx language radio broadcasting are aired on the Isle of Man, supported by the Gaelic Broadcasting Committee.⁴⁶ There are several radio programmes broadcast wholly or partly in Manx by the public service broadcaster Manx Radio, which is required by law to include Manx programming.⁴⁷

58. Some witnesses sought more provision than is currently available. Seán Ó Coinn, Chief Executive of Foras na Gaeilge, reported that Irish in Northern Ireland was represented by a 30-minute programme on BBC Radio Ulster each evening and an occasional programme on BBC Radio 2. He compared this unfavourably to the TV channels mentioned above, which cater solely to Welsh and Scottish Gaelic.⁴⁸ Another witness told us that BBC Radio Cornwall broadcasts five minutes of news in Cornish weekly, but this provision was deemed “very limited and not enough to inspire or encourage more people to learn the language”. Indeed, “more radio and video content is produced by a social enterprise – Radyo an Gernewegva.”⁴⁹

59. Iain Caimbeul, Research Fellow in Sociolinguistics, University of the Highlands and Islands raised similar concerns about Scottish Gaelic television. He suggested that the “funding profile” had been “flatlining”, meaning that programmes were often repeated, and talent in the Gaelic community was overlooked. This “indigenous talent” therefore left for English-language TV.⁵⁰ On the other hand, witnesses flagged up the recent Oscar success of the Irish-language film *An Cailín Ciúin* (The Quiet Girl).⁵¹

60. Culture preserves languages for the future. The Committee heard how in every BIPA jurisdiction, measures to support cultural expression in IMLs go hand-in-hand with the promotion of language. Cornish has a literary corpus dating back hundreds of years, and

⁴⁶ Robert Teare, Oaseir Gaelgagh/Manx Language Officer, Unnid Gaelgagh/Manx Language Unit, Isle of Man Department of Education, Sport and Culture; [Gaelic Broadcasting Committee | Culture Vannin | Isle of Man](#)

⁴⁷ Christopher Lewin, Scrudeyr/Secretary, Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh/Manx Language Society

⁴⁸ Seán Ó Coinn, Chief Executive, Foras na Gaeilge

⁴⁹ Mark Trevethan, Pennledyer Gonisogeth/Principal Culture Lead, Konsel Kernow/Cornwall Council

⁵⁰ Iain Caimbeul, Research Fellow in Sociolinguistics, University of the Highlands and Islands

⁵¹ Aodán Mac an Mhíle, Principal Officer, Gaeltacht Division, Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Government of Ireland

is used in songs, poetry and film.⁵² Manx often plays a prominent role in cultural events, especially in traditional music and dance.⁵³ Literature in Jèrriais has a centuries-old history; Doric, a dialect of Scots, has a long tradition of poetry.⁵⁴ There is an annual literary festival in Doric, though the age profile of competitors is increasing, meaning that the future of the event is not secure.⁵⁵ The Linen Hall library in Belfast contains a wealth of artefacts pertaining to Ulster-Scots and Irish, and its work to collect written records in both languages is vital to understanding their cultural importance.⁵⁶

61. Music is used by promoters of IMLs to celebrate culture and bring people to the languages. On Welsh Language Music Day shops in play Welsh-medium music. Witnesses said that this helped young people feel proud to be Welsh, and proud of the Welsh language.⁵⁷ The National Eisteddfod exhibits traditional music, dancing and poetry.⁵⁸ Under the Identity and Language Act in Northern Ireland, culture and heritage, including music and dance, form a large part of policy on Ulster-Scots.⁵⁹ Music and dance were also useful in encouraging schools to engage with the Ulster-Scots language.⁶⁰

62. If indigenous minority languages are to thrive and prosper, policy-makers must view them as living, working means of building communities. They enable speakers and learners to shop, use public services, engage with society and learn about their cultural heritage.

63. In drafting legislation and policy on IMLs, the governments of the BIPA jurisdictions should consider wherever possible how best to support TV, radio,

⁵² Jasmine Andrevier-Wright, Council member, Kowethas an Yeth Kernewek; Mark Trevethan, Pennledyer Gonisogeth/Principal Culture Lead, Konsel Kernow/Cornwall Council

⁵³ Christopher Lewin, Scrudeyr/Secretary, Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh/Manx Language Society

⁵⁴ Geraint Jennings, Offici pour la promotion du Jèrriais, Héthitage d'Jèrri/Jersey Heritage; Professor Peter Reid, Doric Board

⁵⁵ Geraint Jennings, Offici pour la promotion du Jèrriais, Héthitage d'Jèrri/Jersey Heritage; Professor Peter Reid, Doric Board

⁵⁶ [Homepage - The Linen Hall, Belfast](#)

⁵⁷ Eluned Morgan AM, Baroness Morgan of Ely, Minister for International Relations and the Welsh Language; [Welsh Language Music Day | GOV.WALES](#)

⁵⁸ Bethan Sayed MS, Chair, Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee, National Assembly for Wales

⁵⁹ John McCord, Director of Culture; Jim Davey, Languages Branch, Department for Communities, Northern Ireland

⁶⁰ Ian Crozier, Chief Executive, Ulster-Scots Agency

literature and music. Popular, professionally produced content creates pride in indigenous languages and encourages more people to learn them.

4. Education and indigenous minority languages

Teaching indigenous minority languages in schools

64. In some BIPA jurisdictions pupils are required to learn indigenous minority languages. In Wales, even in English-medium schools, Welsh is a compulsory curriculum subject up to GCSE level, though taking the examination is optional.⁶¹ Welsh is introduced as a second language in such schools in Year 3. In Ireland, learning Irish is compulsory (with some limited exemptions) from the beginning of primary school until the end of senior cycle, but students are not required to sit an examination in the final year.

65. Peripatetic Manx classes are offered up to secondary level, and all state primary and secondary school pupils within the Isle of Man have access to Manx lessons, provided via the Department of Education Sport and Culture's Manx Language Unit. Lessons are provided to children in Key Stages 2, 3, 4 and 5, and students are able to take TCG (GCSE) and A-level equivalent qualifications in Manx, though these currently are not accredited to an exam board and are produced in consultation with CCEA (the awards body for Northern Ireland).⁶² Manx is offered on an optional basis in primary schools from the age of seven for 30 minutes per week, two terms out of three. Most primary schools are now opting to make the language compulsory or default for their pupils.⁶³ Four out of five secondary schools now offer Manx as a timetabled part of the curriculum (as an option instead of another modern language), as opposed to lunchtime clubs, which was formerly the most common means of instruction.⁶⁴

66. Many local authorities in Scotland offer lessons in Scottish Gaelic as a second or third language at primary and secondary school level.⁶⁵ In 2021, 25 primary schools in seven local authorities offered Gaelic classes, and there were 3,599 pupils at secondary level

⁶¹ [Research Brief.pdf \(senedd.wales\)](#)

⁶² Mark Trevethan, Pennledyer Gonisogeth/Principal Culture Lead, Konsel Kernow/Cornwall Council

⁶³ Christopher Lewin, Scrudeyr/Secretary, Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh/Manx Language Society

⁶⁴ Christopher Lewin, Scrudeyr/Secretary, Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh/Manx Language Society

⁶⁵ [Primary Education – Bòrd na Gàidhlig \(gaidhlig.scot\)](#); [Secondary Education – Bòrd na Gàidhlig \(gaidhlig.scot\)](#)

(32 schools in eight local authorities).⁶⁶ Aberdeenshire has a non-official plan to promote the learning of Scots.⁶⁷

5 67. Cornish teaching in schools is limited to 50 primary schools teaching basic language expression such as phrases, games and songs.⁶⁸ Although a teaching team has been working in Jersey schools since 1999, provision for Jèrriais is still spread very thinly. Little curriculum time is available, and an immersion unit has not yet been established. Adult learning is provided for by formal classes, both in-person and online, and by community learning at weekly drop-in café and pub sessions.⁶⁹ There is no formal provision for Ulster-Scots in the Northern Ireland education system.⁷⁰

Primary- and secondary-level IML-medium education

15 68. In Wales, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, the Isle of Man and Cornwall, children can receive IML-medium education at various stages, from nursery to secondary school. There is one Cornish-language nursery in the county, and a Manx-medium nursery and playgroup, as well as a primary school (Bunscoil Ghaelgagh), on the Isle of Man, though another nursery in Douglas closed as it was not financially viable.⁷¹ At Bunscoil Ghaelgagh provision is not limited by catchment area and there is transport assistance available.⁷² The school was described by one witness as “perhaps unique in Europe in providing full immersion education in a language with no traditional native speakers”, educating up to 70 children.⁷³ The majority of its pupils go on to receive a proportion of their secondary education in Manx.⁷⁴

⁶⁶ [Gaelic Language Plan 2022-25 \(sga.org.uk\)](https://sga.org.uk)

⁶⁷ Stuart Pescodd, Gaelic and Scots Division, Education Reform Directorate, Scottish Government

⁶⁸ Mark Trevethan, Pennledyer Gonisogeth/Principal Culture Lead, Konsel Kernow/Cornwall Council

⁶⁹ Geraint Jennings, Offici pour la promotion du Jèrriais, Héthitage d'Jèrri/Jersey Heritage

⁷⁰ Frank Ferguson, Research Director, University of Ulster

⁷¹ [Movyans Skolyow Meythrin](#); Scrudehyr/Secretary, Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh/Manx Language Society

⁷² Robert Teare, Oaseir Gaelgagh/Manx Language Officer, Unnid Gaelgagh/Manx Language Unit, Isle of Man Department of Education, Sport and Culture

⁷³ Robert Teare, Oaseir Gaelgagh/Manx Language Officer, Unnid Gaelgagh/Manx Language Unit, Isle of Man Department of Education, Sport and Culture

⁷⁴ Christopher Lewin, Scrudehyr/Secretary, Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh/Manx Language Society

⁷⁵ Robert Teare, Oaseir Gaelgagh/Manx Language Officer, Unnid Gaelgagh/Manx Language Unit, Isle of Man Department of Education, Sport and Culture

69. In certain jurisdictions, IML-medium schools are evenly spread. There were 440 Welsh-medium schools in April 2021, with 110,142 pupils (23 per cent) being educated in such a school. Welsh-medium education is offered in every Welsh county, though most schools in Anglesey, Gwynedd, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire were Welsh-medium schools. In the other 18 local authorities most schools were English-medium.⁷⁵ Ireland has Irish-language primary schools in every county, with 14 per cent of students attending these schools.⁷⁶

70. In others, there is more patchy provision. In Northern Ireland, 50 nursery schools, 35 primary and five secondary schools offer Irish-language education, though this represents a significant increase on the provision that existed a few decades ago. Approximately 750 children enter Irish-language education in Northern Ireland each year, and around 1,500 start secondary level.⁷⁷ There was optimism among witnesses that the Identity and Language Act would support an expansion in school places.⁷⁸ Secondary immersion education in Manx is more limited than at primary school, being restricted to a small number of subjects at the secondary school nearest to the Bunscoill.⁷⁹ This geographic concentration means that it can prove difficult for families and individuals from the north, south and capital regions of the Isle of Man to access education provision.⁸⁰

71. Scottish Gaelic-medium education is offered in a growing number of schools and by Gaelic Units within schools in a number of local authorities in Scotland.⁸¹ The Scottish Qualifications Authority has the aspiration that every subject at primary school level should be able to be taken in Gaelic and 60 per cent of subjects at secondary level.⁸²

⁷⁵ [Schools' census results: April 2021 | GOV.WALES](#)

⁷⁶ Aodán Mac an Mhíle, Principal Officer, Gaeltacht Division, Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Government of Ireland; Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh, Cathaoirleach (Chairperson), Comhchoiste na Gaeilge, na Gaeltachta agus Phobal Labhartha na Gaeilge (Committee on the Irish Language, Gaeltacht, and Irish-speaking community), Houses of the Oireachtas

⁷⁷ Seán Ó Coinn, Chief Executive, Foras na Gaeilge

⁷⁸ Linda Ervine MBE, Manager, Turas

⁷⁹ Christopher Lewin, Scrudeyr/Secretary, Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh/Manx Language Society

⁸⁰ Christopher Lewin, Scrudeyr/Secretary, Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh/Manx Language Society

⁸¹ [Primary Education – Bòrd na Gàidhlig \(gaidhlig.scot\)](#)

⁸² Jim Whannel, Director of Gaelic Education, Bòrd na Gàidhlig (Gaelic Language Board)

Bòrd na Gàidhlig reported that in 2021 3,801 pupils were in primary Gaelic-medium education (61 schools or units in 15 local authorities), and 1,474 pupils at secondary level (32 schools in 12 local authorities), with the majority of schools located in the north and west of Scotland.⁸³

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72. Witnesses told us of the challenges facing IML-medium education. In Wales, though sufficient numbers of primary-level teachers were being recruited, there were difficulties in finding teachers at secondary level. Because COVID-19 meant less contact teaching, and most children learning Scottish Gaelic at school are not exposed to the language at home, there were concerns about the long-term effects of the pandemic on the growth of the language.⁸⁴ In Ireland, only seven per cent of secondary school students attend an Irish-medium school, with just two per cent going on to tertiary education in the Irish language.⁸⁵ We heard that in Northern Ireland the level of provision in each area depended on the capacity of teachers, headteachers and school budgets.⁸⁶

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73. There are cognitive benefits to children of receiving IML-medium education; research suggests, for example, that children who go through Scottish-Gaelic medium education match or exceed the levels of attainment of monolingual contemporaries in English-medium education.⁸⁷ A Gaelic-medium school in Glasgow has accordingly proved very popular with parents, while Coláiste Feirste, an Irish-language secondary school in Belfast has seen recent successful growth and now has 842 pupils.⁸⁸ There are fears that this level of popularity would lead middle-class parents to favour IML-medium schools, with the result that education provision might be skewed towards those with higher incomes. However, Gaelic-medium schools in Glasgow and Edinburgh have proved equally popular among working-class parents; a further primary school is planned for

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⁸³ [Gaelic Language Plan 2022-25 \(sqa.org.uk\)](https://www.sqa.org.uk/gaelic-language-plan-2022-25)

⁸⁴ Professor Wilson McLeod, Professor of Gaelic, University of Edinburgh

⁸⁵ Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh, Cathaoirleach (Chairperson), Comhchoiste na Gaeilge, na Gaeltachta agus Phobal Labhartha na Gaeilge (Committee on the Irish Language, Gaeltacht, and Irish-speaking community), Houses of the Oireachtas

⁸⁶ Seán Ó Coinn, Chief Executive, Foras na Gaeilge

⁸⁷ [Primary Education – Bòrd na Gàidhlig \(gaidhlig.scot\)](https://www.gaidhlig.scot/primary-education)

⁸⁸ Professor Rob Dunbar, Chair of Celtic Languages, Literature, History and Antiquities, University of Edinburgh; Gráinne Ní Ghilín, Manager, Cultúrlann; [Coláiste Feirste \(colaiстеfeirste.org\)](https://www.colaiстеfeirste.org)

Edinburgh because an existing school in a working-class area of Leith was oversubscribed.⁸⁹ Similarly, in Wales, while in the past middle-class parents might have chosen to send their children to Welsh-medium schools, Welsh-medium primaries have been established in several working-class areas.⁹⁰

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Tertiary-level IML provision

74. University courses in indigenous minority languages are available across the jurisdictions, but in this area as well there are significant divergences. The Doric dialect of Scots is taught at Aberdeen University and many Scottish universities provide Scots courses.⁹¹ However, in Northern Ireland, only the University of Ulster provides a course in Ulster-Scots.⁹² Scottish Gaelic is also taught at universities, and certain institutions such as the University of the Highlands and Islands have long-established Gaelic higher and further education centres.⁹³

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75. In Wales and Ireland there are many tertiary courses in both indigenous languages. Courses in other subjects may be taught through the medium of Welsh and Irish, but degrees in the study of both languages are also popular. We heard that in both jurisdictions, students who had not learnt the languages before, or who had had minimal exposure, frequently signed up to such courses. In Ireland, the need for Irish language expertise in European Union institutions has made degrees in the Irish language more popular, though the higher salaries offered by the institutions have provided competition to the Oireachtas in their efforts to recruit Irish-speaking graduate interpreters.⁹⁴ In both Ireland and Northern Ireland, university accommodation has been set aside for Irish-language speakers to encourage students to use the language outside the classroom.⁹⁵

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⁸⁹ Professor Rob Dunbar, Chair of Celtic Languages, Literature, History and Antiquities, University of Edinburgh

⁹⁰ Eluned Morgan AM, Baroness Morgan of Ely, Minister for International Relations and the Welsh Language

⁹¹ [Doric course at Aberdeen University – scotslanguage.info](http://scotslanguage.info); [Scots language at university](http://scotslanguage.info)

⁹² David Gilliland, Operations Director, Ulster-Scots Community Network

⁹³ [Home - Sabhal Mòr Ostaig \(uhi.ac.uk\)](http://uhi.ac.uk)

⁹⁴ Vivian Uíbh Eachach, Chief Translator, Houses of the Oireachtas Service

⁹⁵ [Dartry - Student residency scheme - Irish Language Office : Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin, Ireland \(tcd.ie\)](http://tcd.ie); [NUIG reserves accommodation for Irish speaking students – The Irish Times](http://www.irishtimes.com) [Queen's confirms plans for Irish language residential scheme - The Irish News](http://www.irishtimes.com); Gráinne Ní Ghilín, Manager, Cultúrlann

76. There is currently no formal tertiary education provision for Manx, either in vocational skills or study of the language.⁹⁶ However, The Isle of Man government has a stated ambition through its Manx Language Strategy 2022-2032 to make provision for learning Manx at the tertiary level, perhaps with support from universities in neighbouring jurisdictions.⁹⁷

77. **Learning indigenous minority languages as a first or second language brings significant benefits to primary, secondary and tertiary-level students. It encourages students to engage with the history and culture of their communities, and strengthens their ability to acquire other languages.**

78. **Students should be able to learn any indigenous minority language that they choose. IMLs now have robust legal protection across the BIPA jurisdictions, but the languages will not reach their potential unless governments provide sufficient backing for IML-medium education.**

Public service provision in indigenous minority languages

79. Across the BIPA jurisdictions governments have made provision for the delivery of public services through the medium of indigenous minority languages, but they vary widely in the provision offered, and provision has developed at varying paces in different jurisdictions.

80. On the Isle of Man there is “widespread use” of “bilingual titles, logos, slogans, signage, email signatures etc. in the public sector, although this is not regulated or enforced by any formal language planning regime or legislation.” However, “it is generally not possible to use the language in communication with public bodies except those divisions

⁹⁶ Christopher Lewin, Scrudeyr/Secretary, Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh/Manx Language Society; Robert Teare, Oaseir Gaelgagh/Manx Language Officer, Unnid Gaelgagh/Manx Language Unit, Isle of Man Department of Education, Sport and Culture

⁹⁷ Robert Teare, Oaseir Gaelgagh/Manx Language Officer, Unnid Gaelgagh/Manx Language Unit, Isle of Man Department of Education, Sport and Culture

dealing directly with the language.”⁹⁸ “Government facilities ... very rarely have a Manx speaker on site,” or other facilities to interact through Manx.⁹⁹

5 81. Cornish is used by Cornwall Council in signage and communications, and the Council provides a translation service.¹⁰⁰ Yet we heard that it was not possible to conduct business with local government entirely in the medium of Cornish, apart from the “limited situations” in which a person employed in public service happens to be a speaker of the language.¹⁰¹

10 82. The Irish government adopted the Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021, which aims to increase the number of services provided in Irish, and includes a target that one in every five adverts for public services should use Irish.¹⁰² Witnesses said that while such measures should increase the visibility of the language, it would still be necessary to support organisations such as Conradh na Gaeilge to promote Irish, particularly
15 among young people.

20 83. As discussed above, the 1993 Welsh Language Act obliges all public sector organisations providing services to the public in Wales to do so in Welsh and English. Cymraeg 50, the Welsh Language Strategy, seeks to further increase the use of Welsh in the delivery of public services; across Wales, Welsh is displayed above English on road signs.¹⁰³ In Northern Ireland, the Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act 2022 requires the Irish Language Commissioner to enhance and protect the use of the Irish language by public authorities in the provision of services to the public, while the Commissioner for Ulster-Scots and the Ulster British tradition must promote awareness

⁹⁸ Christopher Lewin, Scrudeyr/Secretary, Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh/Manx Language Society

⁹⁹ Robert Teare, Oaseir Gaelgagh/Manx Language Officer, Unnid Gaelgagh/Manx Language Unit, Isle of Man Department of Education, Sport and Culture

¹⁰⁰ Mark Trevethan, Pennledyer Gonisogeth/Principal Culture Lead, Konsel Kernow/Cornwall Council

¹⁰¹ Jasmine Andrever-Wright, Council member, Kowethas an Yeth Kernewek; Mark Trevethan, Pennledyer Gonisogeth/Principal Culture Lead, Konsel Kernow/Cornwall Council

¹⁰² Dr Aodhán Mac Cormaic, Director; Aodán Mac an Mhíle, Principal Officer, Gaeltacht Division, Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Government of Ireland

¹⁰³ [Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers \(gov.wales\)](#); [Traffic signs and road markings | GOV.WALES](#)

and help facilitate the use of Ulster-Scots services provided by public authorities to the public in Northern Ireland.¹⁰⁴

5 84. In certain BIPA jurisdictions governments have introduced measures to increase the number of public servants who speak indigenous minority languages, and in particular those with a public-facing role. Though there is no requirement in Scotland for public sector workers to speak an IML,¹⁰⁵ public servants often receive support under Gaelic Language Plans to learn Scots or Gaelic.¹⁰⁶

10 85. Under the Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021 Ireland has set a target for 20 per cent of new recruits to the public service to be competent in Irish by the end of 2030, that all public services in the Gaeltacht will be provided in Irish, that all public offices in the Gaeltacht will operate through the medium of Irish and that a National Plan for the Provision of Public Services in Irish will be developed. Since 2020, Irish Sign Language (ISL) has been recognised as a native language of the State and public bodies are required to provide services through ISL. Public servants working for the Welsh government or Senedd may be expected to speak Welsh to at least a ‘courtesy’ level.¹⁰⁷

20 86. However, despite these policies, we heard that there are still insufficient numbers of Irish-speaking police and doctors to meet the needs of Irish-speaking service users.¹⁰⁸ Welsh authorities sometimes struggle to recruit IML speakers to key jobs, for example in interpretation and social care. And even though there are large numbers of potential users of Welsh-medium services, “all public services in the Welsh language, almost without exception, are underused.”¹⁰⁹

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¹⁰⁴ [Identity and Language \(Northern Ireland\) Act 2022 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁰⁵ Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, Scottish Government

¹⁰⁶ Stuart Pescodd, Gaelic and Scots Division, Education Reform Directorate, Scottish Government

¹⁰⁷ [Eich cyf \(gov.wales\)](#); [Official Languages and Recruitment \(senedd.wales\)](#)

¹⁰⁸ Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh, Cathaoirleach (Chairperson), Comhchoiste na Gaeilge, na Gaeltachta agus Phobal Labhartha na Gaeilge (Committee on the Irish Language, Gaeltacht, and Irish-speaking community), Houses of the Oireachtas

¹⁰⁹ Professor Diarmait Mac Giolla Christ, School of Welsh, Cardiff University

87. Providing public services in indigenous minority languages is vital for the visibility of IMLs and for the sustainability of language communities. But it is clear that users are less likely to request services in their languages if it is too difficult to do so.

5

88. We heard about a range of approaches from the governments of the BIPA jurisdictions to ensure the provision of IML-medium public services. There is no ‘one size fits all’ solution, but public authorities across these islands should cooperate closely in deciding the most appropriate measures to support this aspect of IML provision.

10

5. Challenges for indigenous minority languages

89. Witnesses from across the jurisdictions laid out the challenges for indigenous minority languages. In each jurisdiction IMLs face competition from English, a global language, and while many IMLs are growing in popularity among younger people, the languages sometimes find it difficult to maintain their relevance. Once students have left full-time education, their engagement with indigenous languages tends to drop off. And sometimes their facility with an IML leaves them ill-equipped to continue speaking it: we heard that Gaelic learners often were unable to hold a conversation in the language; others new speakers did not pass it on to their children.¹¹⁰ Despite compulsory Irish language lessons in Ireland, many do not feel comfortable using it outside the classroom.¹¹¹

90. Manx has to contend with “the difficulty for adults to acquire a second language which is substantially different from English and other mainstream European languages, with limited resources, lack of learning opportunities and pressure of careers, family commitments and other interests, especially for younger adults”.¹¹² Without transmission to younger generations, indigenous languages come to rely too much on older speakers. Many proficient Cornish speakers are ageing. Although the language is being taken up by younger people, we heard that they needed to reach similar levels of proficiency to the older generation.¹¹³

91. Other challenges include a lack of availability of IML-medium books and online resources.¹¹⁴ This can lead younger people in particular to prefer to engage with English-

¹¹⁰ Iain Caimbeul, Research Fellow in Sociolinguistics, University of the Highlands and Islands

¹¹¹ Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh, Cathaoirleach (Chairperson), Comhchoiste na Gaeilge, na Gaeltachta agus Phobal Labhartha na Gaeilge (Committee on the Irish Language, Gaeltacht, and Irish-speaking community), Houses of the Oireachtas

¹¹² Christopher Lewin, Scrudeyr/Secretary, Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh/Manx Language Society; Robert Teare, Oaseir Gaelgagh/Manx Language Officer, Unnid Gaelgagh/Manx Language Unit, Isle of Man Department of Education, Sport and Culture

¹¹³ Jasmine Andrever-Wright, Council member, [Kowethas an Yeth Kernewek](#); Mark Trevethan, Pennledyer Gonisogeth/Principal Culture Lead, Konsel Kernow/Cornwall Council

¹¹⁴ Mark Trevethan, Pennledyer Gonisogeth/Principal Culture Lead, Konsel Kernow/Cornwall Council; Jasmine Andrever-Wright, Council member, [Kowethas an Yeth Kernewek](#); Mark Trevethan, Pennledyer Gonisogeth/Principal Culture Lead, Konsel Kernow/Cornwall Council

medium culture.¹¹⁵ Yet while social media might in this regard be viewed as a threat,¹¹⁶ it has provided new outlets for language activists,¹¹⁷ and driven renewed interest in IMLs, particularly in Welsh,¹¹⁸ Scots¹¹⁹ and Irish¹²⁰. Witnesses stressed that the need for languages to adapt to new digital media represented both a challenge and an opportunity.¹²¹

92. Other witnesses were concerned about levels of funding for IMLs, especially for smaller languages. With little official support, Cornish does not have the resources to pay teachers and tends to rely on community groups and volunteers.¹²² Manx also suffers from an “imbalance between formal educational provision and other sectors”.¹²³

The future of indigenous minority languages

93. Witnesses told us that jurisdictions have seen varying degrees of success in their measures to protect and support IMLs.

94. In Scotland, we heard that while, for example, introducing road signage in Scottish Gaelic was welcomed by some advocates of that language, others were concerned that such provisions did not go far enough: that a more concerted effort was necessary to ensure the survival of Gaelic in its heartlands such as the Western Isles. For Professor Conchúr Ó Giollagáin, Director of the University of the Highlands and Islands Language Sciences Institute, language policy was “not close enough to the community, and language promotion fails to stop the decline of vernacular groups.” He suggested that greater provision should be made for expert analysis of language policy and planning.¹²⁴

¹¹⁵ Gordon Hay, Doric Board

¹¹⁶ Aled Roberts, Welsh Language Commissioner

¹¹⁷ Professor Wilson McLeod, Professor of Gaelic, University of Edinburgh

¹¹⁸ Aled Roberts, Welsh Language Commissioner

¹¹⁹ Dr Michael Dempster, Director, Scots Language Centre; Professor Peter Reid, Doric Board

¹²⁰ [\(1\) The Irish For 🇮🇪 \(@theishfor\) / Twitter](#)

¹²¹ Geraint Jennings, Offici pour la promotion du Jèrriais, Héthitage d'Jèrri/Jersey Heritage; Professor Wilson McLeod, Professor of Gaelic, University of Edinburgh

¹²² Mark Trevethan, Pennledyer Gonisogeth/Principal Culture Lead, Konsel Kernow/Cornwall Council

¹²³ Christopher Lewin, Scrudeyr/Secretary, Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh/Manx Language Society

¹²⁴ Professor Conchúr Ó Giollagáin, Director, University of the Highlands and Islands Language Sciences Institute

5 95. Similarly, witnesses said that while efforts in Wales to promote the growth of Welsh were welcome, without a holistic approach that acknowledged the pressures on Welsh-speaking communities and the challenges that they faced, such measures would only go so far to protect the language. Some witnesses advocated housing policies designed to prevent the dilution of Welsh language communities through second home ownership, and suggested that restrictions could be placed on holiday homes.¹²⁵

10 96. In Ireland, various proposals have been made both to restrict holiday home-building in Gaeltacht areas and ease planning restrictions for Gaeltacht residents themselves. Forthcoming planning guidelines are designed to help Irish speakers remain in those areas; witnesses suggested that An Coimisinéir Teanga (the Language Commissioner) might work to ensure that the guidelines are followed.¹²⁶

15 **97. Indigenous minority languages face a multitude of challenges, and BIPA jurisdictions have introduced various policies in response. Some have been more successful than others.**

20 **98. What is clear is that a top-down application of language policy will only go half-way to supporting IMLs with such challenges. Public authorities must engage communities wherever possible to determine the best approach for supporting their languages.**

¹²⁵ Mabli Jones, Cardiff branch, Welsh Language Society

¹²⁶ Dr Aodhán Mac Cormaic, Director, Gaeltacht Division, Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Government of Ireland; Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh, Cathaoirleach (Chairperson), Comhchoiste na Gaeilge, na Gaeltachta agus Phobal Labhartha na Gaeilge (Committee on the Irish Language, Gaeltacht, and Irish-speaking community), Houses of the Oireachtas

6. Conclusion

99. Our inquiry demonstrated the many and varied dynamics affecting indigenous minority languages in these islands. Languages are at different stages of development, have different numbers of speakers and play different roles in the economies and societies of the BIPA jurisdictions. Evaluating them in the round enables us to understand why some languages seem in better health than others.

100. We saw how in places such as the Western Isles, traditional language communities are declining despite significant efforts to promote and protect Scottish Gaelic. The Scots language is almost a victim of its own success – so many people suggest that they have a familiarity with the language that it is sometimes overlooked in IML policy discussions. Manx, Cornish and the Channel Islands languages have such small numbers of speakers that their survival must continually be supported, but there is a noticeable difference between the political support offered languages such as Cornish and that received by many other IMLs.

101. At the other end of the spectrum, although Welsh and Irish are studied by so many school pupils, real efforts must still be made to translate this provision into increased numbers of speakers. The targets introduced in Wales and Ireland – including the aim to reach 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050 – recognise the challenge of supporting indigenous minority languages and the need to ensure political buy-in towards that end. We encourage every BIPA jurisdiction to evaluate the success or otherwise of its IML policies and consider the appropriateness of setting similar targets. It is important, however, for BIPA jurisdictions to recognise that this sort of approach may carry funding implications – gaining public consent for the value of supporting indigenous languages will therefore be crucial.

102. In addition, Wales and Ireland both offer an example of how cross-party consensus on provision for indigenous minority languages can bring benefits, and witnesses across the jurisdictions referred frequently to Welsh in particular as a

template for other IMLs.¹²⁷ An appreciation of the shared challenges facing all IMLs will contribute significantly to strengthening the bonds between the diverse language communities on these islands.

5 103. **With the equal status of Ulster-Scots and Irish under the Identity and Language Act and the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, it is hoped that both languages will thrive in Northern Ireland and Ireland. BIPA is well-placed to continue to monitor the health of indigenous minority languages as they continue to enrich the cultural mix of the BIPA jurisdictions. A focus on the rich culture of**
10 **these languages underlines their vital contribution to our shared history and the connections that tie us together across these islands.**

¹²⁷ For example, Dr Aodhán Mac Cormaic, Director, Gaeltacht Division, Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Government of Ireland; Julian de Spáinn, Ard-Runáí/General Secretary, Conradh na Gaeilge

Appendix 1: Summary of conclusions and recommendations

Legal protection for indigenous minority languages and policies to support their growth have proved beneficial for IMLs across the BIPA jurisdictions.

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Legal frameworks work best where they stress the shared cultural benefit to all communities of supporting IMLs and, in doing so, enable political parties to reach consensus on language policy. BIPA jurisdictions should be mindful of this message when drafting legislation to protect IMLs.

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If indigenous minority languages are to thrive and prosper, policy-makers must view them as living, working means of building communities. They enable speakers and learners to shop, use public services, engage with society and learn about their cultural heritage.

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In drafting legislation and policy on IMLs, the governments of the BIPA jurisdictions should consider wherever possible how best to support TV, radio, literature and music. Popular, professionally produced content creates pride in indigenous languages and encourages more people to learn them.

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Learning indigenous minority languages as a first or second language brings significant benefits to primary, secondary and tertiary-level students. It encourages students to engage with the history and culture of their communities, and strengthens their ability to acquire other languages.

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Students should be able to learn any indigenous minority language that they choose. IMLs now have robust legal protection across the BIPA jurisdictions, but the languages will not reach their potential unless governments provide sufficient backing for IML-medium education.

30

Providing public services in indigenous minority languages is vital for the visibility of IMLs and for the sustainability of language communities. But it is clear that users are less likely to request services in their languages if it is too difficult to do so.

5 **We heard about a range of approaches from the governments of the BIPA jurisdictions to ensure the provision of IML-medium public services. There is no ‘one size fits all’ solution, but public authorities across these islands should cooperate closely in deciding the most appropriate measures to support this aspect of IML provision.**

10 **Indigenous minority languages face a multitude of challenges, and BIPA jurisdictions have introduced various policies in response. Some have been more successful than others.**

15 **What is clear is that a top-down application of language policy will only go half-way to supporting IMLs with such challenges. Public authorities must engage communities wherever possible to determine the best approach for supporting their languages.**

20 **Our inquiry demonstrated the many and varied dynamics affecting indigenous minority languages in these islands. Languages are at different stages of development, have different numbers of speakers and play different roles in the economies and societies of the BIPA jurisdictions. Evaluating them in the round enables us to understand why some languages seem in better health than others.**

25 **We saw how in places such as the Western Isles, traditional language communities are declining despite significant efforts to promote and protect Scottish Gaelic. The Scots language is almost a victim of its own success – so many people suggest that they have a familiarity with the language that it is sometimes overlooked in IML policy discussions. Manx, Cornish and the Channel Islands languages have such small numbers of speakers that their survival must continually be supported, but there is a noticeable difference**
30 **between the political support offered languages such as Cornish and that received by many other IMLs.**

At the other end of the spectrum, although Welsh and Irish are studied by so many school pupils, real efforts must still be made to translate this provision into increased numbers of speakers. The targets introduced in Wales and Ireland – including the aim to reach 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050 – recognise the challenge of supporting indigenous minority languages and the need to ensure political buy-in towards that end. We encourage every BIPA jurisdiction to evaluate the success or otherwise of its IML policies and consider the appropriateness of setting similar targets. It is important, however, for BIPA jurisdictions to recognise that this sort of approach may carry funding implications – gaining public consent for the value of supporting indigenous languages will therefore be crucial.

In addition, Wales and Ireland both offer an example of how cross-party consensus on provision for indigenous minority languages can bring benefits, and witnesses across the jurisdictions referred frequently to Welsh in particular as a template for other IMLs. An appreciation of the shared challenges facing all IMLs will contribute significantly to strengthening the bonds between the diverse language communities on these islands.

With the equal status of Ulster-Scots and Irish under the Identity and Language Act and the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, it is hoped that both languages will thrive in Northern Ireland and Ireland. BIPA is well-placed to continue to monitor the health of indigenous minority languages as they continue to enrich the cultural mix of the BIPA jurisdictions. A focus on the rich culture of these languages underlines their vital contribution to our shared history and the connections that tie us together across these islands.

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Appendix 2: List of organisations that gave evidence to the Committee

The following is a list of organisations that gave evidence to the Committee, either in writing, as part of a visit, or as part of a virtual meeting:

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- To follow

We are grateful to all those who gave evidence.