

Report on the Provision of Gaelic Media Training

Commissioned by MG Alba

From Maggie Cunningham

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Key recommendations:

Diploma in Media Studies taught through SMO with funding from MG Alba and others to continue but to be fully funded through the normal education channels.

SMO to work more closely with other higher education providers, e.g. Napier University, RSAMD and the University of the West of Scotland to enrich the learning experience for students.

SMO to develop modules to support “high level Gaelic skills” for media professionals and for public and private sector craft and professional people working in Gaelic speaking areas and in roles which demand Gaelic fluency.

MG Alba, the BBC and the independent sector to be more proactive in sponsoring opportunities for media students and professionals to attend master classes and seminars delivered by master practitioners.

MG Alba to encourage independent companies to exploit opportunities across the creative industries sector to secure a more versatile skills base

MG Alba to support the creative digital media course for schools, delivered through Gaelic, to be piloted by The Nicolson Institute in session 2010/2011.

Overview

The challenge for MG Alba and BBC Scotland is to ensure that the audience has access to the highest production values in programmes and services, while developing a highly skilled and versatile range of providers.

Skills development and retention is important for all areas of the sector in Scotland, and the need in Gaelic should be looked at in that context. There is an argument that the future security of the language in the media is dependent on highly versatile and highly skilled professionals who work across a range of projects in Gaelic and in the mainstream media. It is also important that the proven benefits of using media to increase confidence in communication be encouraged in Gaelic medium schools as a matter of urgency. The desire must be to have both skilled professionals and a confident audience able to contribute and to use BBC Alba and other Gaelic media.

As television production evolves and becomes a more natural partner with other areas of the creative industries, it is clear that a long term career in one organisation or company is unlikely and it is also questionable whether it is desirable in developing highly skilled practitioners. The best practitioners will hand pick the most interesting and satisfying projects across a range of companies and production areas. It is also important, in that new people joining the profession are able to forge a career path, and succession planning takes account of that.

The biggest area of concern regarding the particular needs of the Gaelic sector is the availability of Gaelic speakers who have a highly developed communication skill in the language. This is the case both in front of camera and in key production areas such as research and direction.

It is relatively easy to source the key craft skills such as camera, sound and lighting, and should not be an area of concern at this stage in the sector's evolution. The exception to this is news and some documentary capture and edit, where multi skilling is paramount to ensuring an effective service on a small budget

Gaelic Speakers in all Gaelic Television Production Roles

While, in an ideal world, the best outcome would be for all concerned with delivery to be fluent Gaelic speakers, there is no belief in the sector that it is a priority at this stage. The core craft skills of capture, editing, multi-camera direction, and sound do not require being language specific and there is an argument that restricting these

roles to Gaelic speakers may not always create the best viewer experience or the highest production values.

However, it is important to encourage Gaelic speakers to develop and practice these skills across the industry. Given the nature of the industry described earlier all production and craft roles should be encouraged to work in other areas of the sector to ensure that their skills and experience over time exceed the expectation of the viewer. The objective must be to encourage Gaelic speakers to become highly skilled media professionals and be able to compete with others in similar roles across the UK and internationally. This will develop their skills and experience base and enable them to enhance Gaelic specific projects that they are involved with. It will also create a path for new people joining the industry and ensure effective succession planning.

Existing and potential providers of Training

There are two specific courses which combine Gaelic and media, both are based at Sabhal Mor Ostaig, the Gaelic College. B.A in Gaelic and Media Studies is funded through the normal funding council route, while the Diploma in Gaelic Media has had a number of funding sources to date, including MG Alba. Lews Castle also provides a BA in Gaelic and Cultural Studies which encompasses media. There is a range of Gaelic undergraduate courses provided by Glasgow, Aberdeen and Edinburgh Universities while the number of courses related to television, film, creative industries and journalism are provided by a range of tertiary education establishments.

There is a wide range of courses and modules in the creative industries and in media studies.

Potential partners in the delivery of Gaelic Media Training

The recommendation is for SMO to continue to provide a diploma in media studies through the medium of Gaelic. This should provide familiarisation in all areas of mainstream media - journalism in its broadest sense as well as audio, video and internet. The course will also provide the baseline skills for self-shooting direction and video journalism.

A six month placement is recommended as part of the diploma, and could be with any company or organisation working in these disciplines. If students do not take placements with Gaelic companies or the Gaelic department of the BBC, SMO must be extra vigilant to ensure that Gaelic communication skills needed for the sector continue to be developed during the placement.

The College should also develop partnerships with other providers of media studies to ensure the best possible learning and peer group experience for its students. Initial negotiations are underway and should be encouraged to develop. Possible partners include the University of the West of Scotland, Edinburgh Napier University and the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama.

There is no doubt that SMO is the Centre of Excellence for Gaelic and most of the concentrated work on Gaelic fluency and competence has been developed at the College over the past few decades. There is now an urgent need to fill the role in language acquisition and richness previously acquired in the Gaelic communities and this should be provided through SMO.

The need for high level Gaelic communication skills has been recognised by Bòrd na Gàidhlig and most recently by the Minister for Education and Life Long Learning. While, there may be political problems in acknowledging this need, there is no doubt that it must be addressed urgently if the targets set for Bòrd na Gàidhlig are to be met and if television viewing and radio listening is to continue to be a rewarding experience for Gaelic speakers.

The need is apparent across a range of professional roles. These include teaching, policy making and translation and, with Gaelic plans to be implemented by all areas of the public sector, health provision and similar disciplines.

The challenge for SMO is to define a modular course which will underpin a highly developed articulacy in communication both written and spoken to ensure that the richness of language is preserved and evolves. It will also have to fulfil the key criteria necessary to satisfy funding bodies such as the Scottish Funding Council. The model must reflect the needs of all the sectors involved and will, of necessity, contain a range of modules which will enable continuous professional development and highly developed language skills. Specific modules for Gaelic media should be developed and these should include research, writing for television, radio and the internet and presentation for television, radio and the internet.

Proposed model for the Delivery of Industry Training for the Gaelic Production Sector

It is clear that there are a range of potential models for the sector and it is clear from discussions with the industry that the models must encompass a range of training. It is highly unlikely, that the specific needs of production and craft can be bundled and delivered as one package.

While some areas of capture and delivery have amalgamated, there remain discrete skills which are paramount to ensuring effective engagement of the audience. There are specific disciplines for craft, for production and for journalism. It is unlikely that one course could cover all the disciplines to a high level and it is unrealistic to expect that this would be a rewarding learning experience for participants once they have completed a course such as the diploma described above.

MG Alba should continue to influence and/or work with others to provide high level continuous professional development for industry professionals and must include high level Gaelic communication skills. These should strive to be master classes, seminars or short courses led by the most accomplished industry practitioners in their specific disciplines in the UK or in Ireland. There may be an opportunity to use Fàs as a base for these courses utilising its hardware and production spaces and building on the successful workshops delivered, with others, for FilmG. The master classes could include entertainment format development; screenwriting; comedy development; the art of documentary and storytelling – the list is endless. Three or four master classes a year should be established.

Media Awareness in Schools

Working with media is a proven to develop confidence in children. By teaching creative media skills through the medium of Gaelic there is a real opportunity to set the building blocks for the next generation of media professionals and, more importantly, a confident generation of Gaelic speakers. A creative digital media course is being piloted in the Nicolson Institute from next session (2010/2011). There is already interest in this course from Lochaber and Portree High Schools and it has the potential to be rolled out to all Gaelic medium secondary schools.

The course has been developed by the curriculum support team in Comhairle nan Eilean. They have run similar courses related to other industries such as weaving, building and hospitality. They report enthusiasm and support from practitioners in the sectors mentioned above, but little interest or support, at this stage, from practitioners in the creative industries' sector. There is a real opportunity to influence and support this initiative through further development of FilmG and/or specific workshops with inspirational media practitioners to encourage confidence in pursuing further studies or careers in media and to highlight the importance of developing "high level" communication skills in Gaelic.

Encouraging entrepreneurship

If the sector is to be sustainable and able to expand and develop, it is important for MG Alba and for the enterprise and training agencies to encourage a culture of

entrepreneurship in exploiting new and different opportunities across a range of markets related to the creative industries. At present, many of the companies employing Gaelic speaking media professionals are dependent on the commissioning decisions for BBC Alba. The opportunity to develop skills and versatility as well as reasonable employment in the long term cannot be wholly sustained through MG Alba and the BBC's Gaelic commissioning budgets neither does it create enough scope to allow for new joiners and succession planning to any great degree.

Companies and freelancers within the sector should be encouraged to seek and exploit new opportunities both in the public and private sector and help to ensure a range of skills and talents which will be important in addressing the economic migration from the most fragile communities of what remains of the Gaelic heartland. This will in turn create a broad base of highly skilled and experienced professionals who will be available to deliver high quality video content to the delight and enrichment of the audience.