## Eilidh MacKenzie – Manaidsear Fèis Sgoil at Fèisean nan Gàidheal.

I work for Fèisean nan Gàidheal and we receive funding from Creative Scotland, Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Inside Fèisean nan Gàidheal we have different levels of Gaelic. Some have had Gaelic from birth but others are still learning. We are fortunate to have the opportunity to develop our skills and four times each year we meet to develop our skills and develop the organisation.

Fèisean nan Gàidheal accepts that we are all at different levels with our language skills some of us have been lucky to have Gaelic as a first language and some of us haven’t. Some of us have come to it much later in life and we are conscious as an organisation that everybody is able to use the Gaelic to the level that they want to use it. We do ensure that, for example, four times a year we meet together as an organisation and work on things that are of common benefit to us all as regards language. Some people inside the organisation, although they might be first language Gaelic speakers are not necessarily confident about their reading and writing skills, particularly writing. So, we have days that we designate for that. So, we are very lucky that those opportunities are there and we are very conscious to that people in the community who work through Fèisean nan Gàidheal, if it’s on a Fèisean committee or as a tutor that they also get those opportunities so we are constantly trying to improve that.

Gaelic was not my first language, but I used to sing in Gaelic when I was really small. I did have some language skill, but I continue to learn daily.

So, my own personal Gaelic level, unfortunately it’s not my first language my mother doesn’t have Gaelic so it wasn’t in the home but my father was a very keen Gaelic singer and ensured that we all sang in it before we sang in English. So, it was our first singing language, but it wasn’t our first spoken language.

For me there is a lovely community within Gaelic, but on top of that you have the opportunity to work throughout the country, or work from home, the office and there is the chance to arrange that. It is really important to have that in the Highlands in particular.

For me, I think that one of the main benefits of working in Gaelic is there is a very specific and lovely community in the Gaelic world and everybody is very supportive of everyone else but beyond that there is a very definite understanding of the fact that people need to be able to work in a very flexible manner and to approach work in lots of different ways. So, for example, you could be in the Western Isles but working for an organisation based in on the mainland. Obviously, that works with some of the English-language based companies too, and organisations, but certainly within the Gaelic world there’s a real understanding of that and I think that’s very important.

Some organisations will have a Gaelic language plan and they do have a duty then to actually make sure that their staff have the proper support so that those who want to be incorporating it into their work have the opportunity to do so. Beyond that I think, all organisations, if any staff member does have an interest can point them in lots of directions. There are plenty resources online for learning Gaelic, but I think for me the key thing is visibility. The more Gaelic we see around us the less alien it might feel to everybody and we have a greater chance at actually changing the attitude of the general public to it being positive, if it isn’t already.

Inside Fèisean nan Gàidheal it’s not about Gaelic being equal, we use Gaelic more. There are lots of opportunities for staff even although there might not be Gaelic in that organisation. There are many ways of learning Gaelic in particular the internet but also, as an example, Fèisean nan Gàidheal run Tac an Teine which is an opportunity to sit an sing songs together where everybody is welcome. We also (Fèisean nan Gàidheal) have a coffee and conversation day once a week where again everybody is welcome.

So, I today we are in a fortunate place to some extent in that we now have the opportunity for all children in Scotland, well certainly by the year 2021, to have three languages at primary school. So they will have their language through which they are taught, whether that is English or Gaelic, and then they will have a further two languages. Most schools are already doing this, and there is a huge opportunity there for teachers and local authorities to take Gaelic in as a language and ensure that, okay after a year of Gaelic these children are not going to be able to speak the language possibly but we do have a duty to make sure that Gaelic a fair crack at the whip and that actually, children have appositive outlook on the whole culture and understand that it is something for everybody and not just for those who are born speaking it.