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Blas 2007: Social and Economic
Impact Study

Fèisean nan Gàidheal

FINAL REPORT

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Executive Summary

The Blas Festival is an annual pan-Highland festival that celebrates the music and culture of the Highlands. It has a strong focus on involving young people and local communities, and includes among its primary aims the promotion of traditional Highland music and the Gaelic language. Blas began in 2004 and aims to become a major international Celtic music festival.

Fèisean nan Gàidheal (FnG) and The Highland Council commissioned a review of the Blas 2007 Festival examining its social and economic impacts. The review draws upon interviews with organisers, promoters and participants in Blas 2007. In addition, a self-completion audience survey was also conducted by Blas. The review also draws upon research undertaken for Blas as part of Highland 2007 – Scotland's Year of Highland Culture.

Blas 2007 covered 53 events (a rise from 43 in 2006 and 32 in 2005), involving over 30 groups of performers across 48 venues in the Highland Council area. The types of venue and the mix of artists and performers were both very wide-ranging. One event, Harvest, included 15 internationally known singers and musicians performing alongside more than 40 young fèisean and/or Ceilidh Trail musicians.

Total attendances in 2007 numbered 5,061 (a rise from 4,600 in 2006 and 2,800 in 2005). 25% of events were sold out in 2007, a fifth more than in 2006.

An estimated 53% of audiences were local, a further 17% from elsewhere in the Highlands, 21% from the rest of the UK and 8% from overseas.

The main sponsors and supporters included Clydesdale Bank, The Highland Council, Highland 2007, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Scottish Arts Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Fèisean nan Gàidheal, plus a number of other commercial and non-commercial sponsors. Total income for Blas 2007 was £341,000. FnG is confident that the festival will have met its budget targets for the year.

In 2007, Blas became a limited company and in October 2007 a new board of directors was appointed, including representatives of Fèisean nan Gàidheal and The Highland Council. Blas has until now been project-managed by Fèisean nan Gàidheal, an arrangement which will continue with FnG being contracted by the new Board to offer management services. The day-to-day running of Blas is sub-contracted to three businesses which together are responsible for the roles of Festival Director, Artistic Director and PR functions.

One of the collaborating bodies in the development of the Blas Festival was the Promoters Arts Network (PAN), an independent membership-led networking body which includes 99 local promoters throughout the Highlands and Islands. In total, around 400 promoters and local volunteers helped on an unpaid basis before and during the festival.

By underwriting the cost of events, as well as offering a promotional umbrella, Blas makes a considerable impact in reducing the financial risk to promoters of staging an event. This

results in a more geographically dispersed and artistically rich mix of events. Promoters also benefit from the considerable organisational experience of Blas.

In 2007, some lessons were learned surrounding the most effective way to advertise a growing number of events and the timing of multiple events in the same locality so as to minimise audience displacement. Although there was some unsold capacity at many events there was good growth in audience numbers in 2007. This is commendable given the marked rise in the number of festivals on offer in the Highlands and the inevitable competition this can cause.

Audiences rated Blas events very highly and value for money was also generally thought to be high (although ticket prices were said to be too high in some instances). Audience surveys demonstrated that the festival is a factor in moving people around the Highlands and in attracting people into the Highlands. With regard to non-residents in the audiences by no means all visitors come to the area purely because of Blas. However, 37% of visitors felt that Blas had been an important factor in their decision to visit the Highlands.

Taking this 'additionality' aspect into account, expenditure on artist fees and all other costs associated with the Festival, plus the expenditure impacts of additional visitors, Blas was responsible for around £460,000 additional expenditure in the Highlands which supports around 12 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs.

These findings suggest that as the Blas Festival has become more established it is beginning to attract visitors to the Highlands, even in small numbers, including from overseas countries. It also plays a role in enhancing the stay of visitors who are in the area anyway.

Overall, Blas 2007 was successful in furthering the festival's main aims:

- Almost all consultees (94%) felt that Blas celebrates and strengthens traditional Highland Music and also (91% of consultees) that it promotes Gaelic. Audience rating of the rating Gaelic content of events was 4.3 in 2007 compared with 3.9 in 2006.
 - The majority of consultees (71%) agreed that Blas 2007 was succeeding in getting communities involved in some way, and to some extent encouraging greater interest in traditional music events and other cultural events.
 - Blas 2007 actively involved large numbers of young people as performers and participants in a range of events (Open Stage, Fun Day, Runrig launch, as acts/support acts in Blas main events and in art workshops with schoolchildren).
 - Most consultees (70%) agreed that Blas in some way 'innovates and excites'. There were reports of Blas creating a tangible buzz before events. All but one of the consultees (97%) agreed that Blas 2007 had created a 'feelgood factor', including among organisers, performers and audiences.
 - In addition to featuring artists from Canada and other countries, Blas is beginning to attract new audiences from overseas, and there should be potential to build on this through targeted overseas marketing, including web links from other international festival sites such as Celtic Colours, and alliances with other tourism / activity operators.
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1.0 Section One

Introduction and Background to Blas Festival

Background to Study

Fèisean nan Gàidheal and The Highland Council wished to carry out a social and economic impact study of the Blas 2007 Festival and commissioned Snedden Economics to do this work. Snedden Economics were at the same time part of the evaluation team for the Highland 2007 year of events, and were permitted to access some of that research to help inform this study.

Profile of Blas

The Blas Festival is an annual pan-Highland festival that celebrates the music and culture of the Highlands. It has a strong focus on involving young people and local communities, and includes among its primary aims the promotion of traditional Highland music and the Gaelic language.

Influenced by the Celtic Colours festival in Nova Scotia, The Highland Council devised Blas in 2004 in partnership with Fèisean nan Gàidheal and the Promoters' Arts Network (PAN). After being piloted in 2004, Blas launched officially with a nine-day programme of events in 2005, followed by similar festivals in 2006 and 2007.

Blas Aims and Objectives

The stated Aims and Objectives of Blas are to develop into a major, international Celtic music festival taking place throughout the Highland Council area by continuing to:

- Celebrate and strengthen traditional Highland music and promote Gaelic
- Involve communities as proactive participants, and grow new audiences
- Innovate and excite
- Involve young people from the Highlands
- Be an international event, building new audiences, and have visiting artists particularly but not exclusively from Nova Scotia

Other roles of Blas include being the vehicle for supporting five Fèis Ceilidh Trails, and an annual Gaelic Music in Schools week usually held at the time of the Blas Festival.

Study Objectives

The main purpose of the study was to identify how well Blas as a festival meets its own stated Aims and Objectives as described above. The detailed study objectives are to provide:

- A profile of Blas visitors in 2007, including a breakdown of age and whether of local, national or international origin
 - An analysis of the involvement of Youth in the festival
 - An analysis of the meaning and value of Blas to the local communities involved, from the perspective both of economic advantage but more importantly in further strengthening
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community participation and interest in Gaelic and Highland Music and in cultural events in general

- An assessment of the success of Blas as a festival in terms of attendance, perceived quality, value for money and of the value of the Gaelic content as an essential part of the festival
- An assessment of the impact of Blas 2007 on the economy of the Highlands in terms of direct, indirect and induced benefits; to include employment, and tourism
- A note of suggested areas of improvement for the future that could further maximise the potential for Blas to become a key player in attracting international visitors to the Highlands
- A summary of whether Blas 2007 created a 'feelgood factor', including among participants and audiences

Methodology

The methodology adopted for this study included two main components:

1. Key Contact Interviews (Snedden Economics) – telephone interviews with 35 organisers, promoters and participants in Blas 2007
2. Self-Completion Audience Survey (Blas organisers and promoters) – handed out to attendees at events for completion on the night

In addition, the study refers to an analysis of the results of 164 self-completion/face-to-face Blas Festival visitor surveys that were carried out as part of the Highland 2007 evaluation. This data complements that of the self-completion audience surveys carried out for the third successive year by Blas personnel and event promoters.

2.0 Section Two

Overview of Blas 2007

Blas Festival 2007 – summary

Blas 2007 encompassed 53 events by more than 30 different groups of performers across 48 venues in the whole Highland Council area. A core group of performers made multiple appearances across different venues in the various geographic areas. For the first time since its inception the Blas Festival included the Inverness area as a location for events.

The wide range of performers included primarily Highland- or Scottish-based traditional musicians as well as a few artistes from other countries. Young musicians involved in six local Ceilidh Trails were showcased at least once and more often twice in six of the eight geographic areas. The range of venues used for events was diverse, including larger-scale venues such as cathedrals, churches, a castle and arts/community centres, smaller community spaces such as village halls and schools, and one event on a Loch Ness cruise boat. Half of the events programmed took place in village halls.

Financial support for the 2007 Festival included main sponsorship from the Clydesdale Bank. Other sponsors and supporters included The Highland Council, Highland 2007, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Scottish Arts Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Fèisean nan Gàidheal, Jacobite Cruises, Highland Flying School, Highlander Music, BBC Radio Scotland, Live Music Now Scotland and the PRS Foundation. Total income for Blas in the 2007-08 year was £341,290.

Participants

The number of individual performers participating in Blas 2007 is estimated in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1 Estimated number of performers in Blas Festival 2007

Performer Type/Event	Number
Highland-based Ceilidh Trailers (under 25s)	50
TMSA Young Trad Musicians Tour (under 25s)	7
Harvest (40+ under 25s, 15 professionals)	55
Sgoil Chiùil na Gàidhealtachd pupils (aged 17-18)	3
Other Highland- / Scottish-based artists	100+
Other UK and Ireland	10
International	12
Crann-Tàra (touring band)	3
Open Stage (under 25s, volunteers)	30
TOTAL	270+

Artists taking part in Blas were primarily based in the Highlands or other parts of Scotland; a few others originated in England and Ireland. Two groups from Canada (Nova Scotia) were also involved, as well as individual performers from France and Spain.

The mix of artists covered a range of profiles including internationally known performers and musicians such as Karen Matheson and Shooglenifty through to others best known locally, including choirs, community groups and young fèisean performers. The wide-ranging programme included acts whose inception was facilitated by Blas 2007, for example, Na Seòid, a group of seven male Gaelic singers led by Mary Ann Kennedy; KIN, a competitively commissioned multi-media performance by Duncan Chisholm; and, as in previous years, CLAN, in which performers from Canada share the stage with those from the Highlands (this year featuring the Henderson family from Lochaber and the MacNeils from Cape Breton). Support acts included local acts such as Gaelic choirs, and young musicians drawn from the six Highland Ceilidh Trails and local fèisean. One event, Harvest, included 15 internationally known singers and musicians performing alongside more than 40 young fèisean and/or Ceilidh Trail musicians.

For more feedback on the involvement in Blas 2007 of Ceilidh Trailers and other young people, see Section Six, Community and Other Impacts.

Other new features for Blas 2007, all of which featured young performers or participants, included:

Crann-Tàra

A group of three paid musicians under the name Crann-Tàra, specifically formed for Blas 2007. They travelled around the Highlands in the week before and during the Blas Festival, performing impromptu sessions at various locations such as transport hubs (eg airports, ferry terminals, bus stops) and Tourist Information Offices, to help raise the profile of the Festival.

Open Stage Performances

Open Stage performances were held over two Saturdays in Inverness and Fort William town centres. Solo and group performers aged eight to 25 were invited in advance to book a 15-20 minute slot. Performances were done on a voluntary basis, and designed to provide an opportunity for lower-profile young singers and musicians to showcase their talents in a public space. Numbers involved were around 30, with typical ages of performers ranging from 10 to 17. Participant numbers were higher in Inverness than Fort William, which was affected by the UCI Mountain Bike and Trials World Championships which were taking place at the same time.

Blas Festival Fun Day / Gaelic Arts Strategic Development Forum

A four-hour fun day for children was held in Inverness on 1 September, promoted under the Blas umbrella by the Stornoway-based Gaelic Arts Strategic Development Forum (GASD). Activities were conducted in both Gaelic and English and included one worker from the Forum plus four paid individuals providing sessions of musical games, art, storytelling and healthy eating. Around 35 children attended this free event.

The Fun Day was part of GASD's audience development programme, aimed at developing younger audiences. GASD were also involved with Fèisean nan Gàidheal in carrying out workshops throughout schools in the Highlands involving around 250 children from 13 schools in the Lochaber, Ross-shire and Badenoch & Strathspey areas. Activities included preparing music- and Gaelic-related artwork for display at various Blas venues.

Live Music Now (Scotland)

In 2007 Blas entered into a new partnership with the charity Live Music Now (Scotland), which supports paid performance opportunities for young musicians and encourages access to music for everyone. During Blas 2007, three young musicians gave private performances at a range of venues, with events aimed at primary school audiences, families, older people/care home residents, and adults with learning disabilities.

Promoters and Volunteers

One of the collaborating bodies in the development of the Blas Festival was the Promoters Arts Network (PAN), an independent membership-led networking body which includes 99 local promoters throughout the Highlands and Islands, with 55 of them in the Highland Council area.

In 2007, 41 promoters were contracted by Blas to hold and promote events during the Blas Festival, 27 of whom are PAN members and mainly representatives of local voluntary arts groups. Of the 53 Blas 2007 events, 29 were promoted by PAN members (two members promoted two events each). Other promoters included representatives of schools and Council-run venues such as the MacPhail Centre in Ullapool, which employ their own paid staff whose involvement with Blas events is considered part of their job, or (in schools) an optional extra. Blas itself acted as promoter for six events, three of which were held in cathedrals or churches, one in Eilean Donan Castle, and another (Harvest, in collaboration with Fèis Rois) in two major venues in Aviemore and Fort William.

Promoters are sent an information pack by Blas which advises them on what is expected in terms of staging and promoting the Blas event. All associated costs (for example venue hire, publicity, accommodation for performers, hiring lighting and PA crews etc) are dealt with and paid for upfront by Blas. Blas underwrites each event so there is no financial risk to the promoters. Promoters generally receive a commission of 30% of the box office sales less cost of the venue hire. This, along with any profits made from interval refreshments, is invested back into the promoting body's funds.

In addition, Blas organisers estimated that in 2007 a total of around 400 promoters and local volunteers helped before and during Blas events. This estimate is largely borne out by interviews with promoters, most of whom indicated a core of usually two to five committee members, often supplemented on the night by additional helpers. Volunteer activities included distributing posters, brochures and fliers; front of house/ticket sales and stewarding; preparing and serving interval refreshments; photocopying and distributing audience surveys and completing other Blas-related paperwork etc. For Blas-promoted events, volunteers were sought primarily from local fèisean and other associated groups.

3.0 Section Three

Blas 2007 Management, Expenditure and Employment

Contracted Blas Employment

In 2007, Blas became a limited company and in October 2007 a new board of directors had just been appointed including representatives of Fèisean nan Gàidheal and The Highland Council. Blas has, until now, been project-managed by Fèisean nan Gàidheal. This arrangement will continue, with Fèisean nan Gàidheal being contracted by the new Board to offer management services. Blas also directly sub-contracts three self-employed businesses, as shown in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1 Blas 2007 – contracted employment

Company	Role	FTE equivalent	Fee £
Firefly Productions	Festival Director	1.25+	23,500
Anam Communications	Artistic Director	0.5	10,500
Kane Communications	Press & PR Manager	0.1	3,000
TOTAL		1.9	£37,000

Other Organisations

In 2007, Fèisean nan Gàidheal were paid a management fee from the Blas Festival budget which covered some but not all of the time spent by various Fèisean nan Gàidheal staff on Blas-related duties. Details are shown in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2 Fèisean nan Gàidheal – Blas-related work

Type of Activity	FTE equivalent	Management Fee from Blas £
Management (2 staff)		
Action Group planning meetings etc (3 staff)	1.4	10,000
Administration, finance (1 staff)		
Attendance at events (various representatives)		
TOTAL	1.4	£10,000

Fèisean nan Gàidheal estimate that the total staff time spent on Blas 2007 was equivalent to 1.4 FTE jobs, which is disproportionately higher than the fee paid. This suggests that Fèisean nan Gàidheal is absorbing the additional costs of staff time from their own budget. Types of staff involvement ranged from Steering Group and Action Group meetings, processing payments and updating budgets, and attending Blas events – one or two Blas Action Group representatives attended each Blas event to help out and/or act as a Fear- or Bean-an-Taighe (Master of Ceremonies), introducing the event in both Gaelic and English.

Indirect Impacts – Blas 2007 Expenditure

Blas 2007 expenditure excluding contract staff and management fees is summarised in Table 3.3 below. Expenditure totalled almost £294,000. Around 93% (£270,000) of this amount was spent within the Highlands and Islands.

Table 3.3 Blas 2007 Expenditure

Description	Spend (£)
Artist fees, accommodation, meals, travel, Ceilidh Trails	210,102
Marketing and publicity (including Runrig Launch Event)	30,400
PA & Lighting	27,000
Venue Hire / Commission to Promoters	16,000
Administration, overheads etc	5,000
Social and Economic Impact Study	5,000
TOTAL	293,502

Note: Total Expenditure = £340,502 including £47,000 contract staff/management fees outlined in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 above

Summary of Expenditure and Employment Impacts

Table 3.4 below provides an estimated breakdown of the employment impacts created by the Blas 2007 Festival. The visitor expenditure impacts relate to additional visits or lengthened visits to the Highland area. The methodology behind the visitor expenditure figure of £120,000 in Table 3.4 is provided later in Section 5.

The indirect employment impact relates to expenditure on artists' fees and other suppliers in the Highlands and Islands as described above. Expressed in FTE 'job-years', this impact is, in reality, very widely dispersed across a large number of businesses and individuals, mostly improving the viability of existing jobs rather than creating discrete, new jobs per se¹.

Table 3.4 Blas 2007 Expenditure and Employment Impacts

	Expenditure (£)	FTE estimate
Direct (Blas and FnG)	47,000	3.3
Indirect	293,500	5.8
Additional visitor expenditure (including multiplier impacts)	120,000	3.4
TOTAL	460,000	12.5

In addition to the employment impacts summarised in Table 3.4 above, Blas involved around 400 individuals in a voluntary capacity. Aggregating this part-time and temporary input amounted to an additional 5 FTEs of unpaid input to Blas.

¹ A broad a ratio of 1 fte:£50,000 is applied to indirect expenditure

4.0 Section Four

Meaning and Value of Blas 2007

A total of 34 promoters and Blas venues (where Blas was the promoter) were consulted by telephone as part of this study, along with three performers, two Ceilidh Trail representatives, and one hotel.

Promoters and Venues

The Blas Festival effectively offers event promoters not just a promotional umbrella but also a financial safety net by underwriting the costs of the event, including any loss that might be made. Promoters generally receive 30% of the box office sales from Blas, less the cost of the venue hire.

In order to gauge the additionality of Blas support in terms of promoters' ability or inclination to stage similar traditional music events, promoters were asked to indicate what difference being part of the Blas Festival had made, if any, to their event. The degree to which an association with Blas results in "additional" impacts of any nature is termed 'additionality'.

Table 4.1 below represents an analysis of the feedback received in terms of the additionality of Blas support to promoters and venues.

Table 4.1 Additionality of Blas support to promoters and venues

Additionality	Number	% of promoters /venues consulted
Would not/could not do this without Blas financial support (100% additionality)	13	38%
Might do it, but partial benefits from Blas (whether of scale, quality, time or financial support)	19	56%
Easily do it, no real difference (0% additionality)	2	6%
TOTAL	34	100%

As well as the 13 promoters/venues consulted who would not have held the event without Blas, a further 12 consultees considered the financial support / underwriting offered by Blas to be important, giving a total of 25 promoters/venues (74%) for whom Blas financial support was an important element of the project.

Overall, among the 34 promoters and venues consulted, the average additionality of the Blas 2007 events is estimated to be in the region of 65%, including financial support, the scale and quality of the event (including performers, production, promotion and marketing), and the importance to the promoter of reduced event organisational time due to Blas's involvement.

Highest additionality

Types of venues recording the highest additionality included schools and cathedrals, which by their nature would not themselves stage events which were not self-financing – most of these had acted as venues for other types of events in the past; two of those consulted had staged a Blas event before.

More traditional arts venues which suggested highest additionality included remote venues in small or scattered communities, which often were without any other source of events funding (such as Scottish Arts Council, Highland Council, Lottery etc) and stated they could not afford the initial outlay or financial risk involved in staging such an event, especially in communities where audience turnout is also a high risk factor.

A representative from PAN confirmed that feedback from PAN promoters suggested that particularly for venues who don't do a lot of promoting of events, Blas is giving them an impetus to put on good shows. The organisational help from Blas and potential financial benefits from the box office cut are considered a big incentive in encouraging promoters to make an effort – if they get something back, they feel rewarded, and the representative believes this is an essential aspect to the success of the festival.

Other venues suggesting highest additionality included some with other sources of funding, but where financial risk of such an event was also considered too great, including in some cases the costs of hiring in sound and lighting crews and equipment as well as the cost of the performers. One Inverness-shire promoter commented that the type of financial support offered by Blas allowed promoters to “test the water with different types of events that otherwise would be too much of an outlay or risk”. Another Lochaber-based promoter suggested that it would have needed about two to three years' of his community group's budget to stage this year's Blas event, which had been in his opinion the best event his group had ever promoted.

Partial additionality

In addition to those included under ‘highest additionality’ above, more than half of the promoters and venues consulted suggested that while they could probably attempt a similar type of event themselves, there were tangible benefits to collaborating with Blas. Most of those consulted suggested more than one benefit (analysed here in terms of financial support, scale, quality and time).

Financial support

The most frequently mentioned single benefit was the security offered by Blas's underwriting of the event, which meant the promoter “couldn't lose”. For example, in one Inverness-shire venue with limited funding but which is committed to offering a regular programme of events specifically aimed at the local community, this was an important boost after a run of three events which had made a loss.

Scale and Quality

Other benefits which in many cases were linked to the financial support offered by Blas, included benefits of scale and quality. Typical things mentioned included the quality of the acts involved and also the quality of the stage production (sound, lighting etc), and there were mentions of one or both of these by many promoters, with a good number of these extremely enthusiastic about the overall quality of the performances. Several venues had received their highest ever audience turnout.

One Inverness-shire promoter felt that their venue had itself had its profile raised and given a “stamp of quality” by being involved as a Blas venue in 2007. In another relatively new SAC-funded venue in Lochaber still trying to establish itself as a regular venue, the financial support was considered a factor in the quality of the act they could book. In another Highland Council-funded venue in Wester Ross, the financial support allowed them to bill a traditional music event which, despite the availability of similar acts touring each month, they otherwise wouldn’t consider doing because of the financial risk involved.

These comments were typical of a number of venues – several promoters mentioned that there were very few higher profile acts (such as ‘Phil and Aly’ or ‘Blazin’ Fiddles’) for which they could guarantee sell-out audiences, and thus they were reluctant to risk the financial outlay of booking less well-known higher-quality acts when they could not predict a decent audience turnout. In this regard, Blas seems to be having an impact in broadening the traditional music repertoire that various types of venues are financially able or prepared to promote, including not just small remotely located venues but larger-scale venues such as the Aros Centre in Portree and the Nevis Centre in Fort William – spokespeople for both these venues spoke very highly of the quality of Blas acts and the unlikelihood that they would themselves have booked some of these acts.

Another benefit of scale and quality mentioned by some promoters included the general organisation done by Blas, including the marketing and promotion, which most were generally happy with. Some issues were raised, including: too many brochures to distribute; a desire for banners outside venues (banners were provided in some locations but not all); more promotion of local ticket outlets on Blas publicity; and Blas to work more in tandem with local promoters in terms of timing and placing of newspaper advertisements. At least one promoter was impressed by the Blas branding and generic posters, but around three promoters felt that the generic posters (with the only difference being overprinted event details at the foot) were confusing when several events were being promoted in one area and often in the same outlets. It was suggested that in such cases a single poster with multiple event details on it would be a more effective promotional tool, and would reduce the chance of losing potential attendees who did not realise that the ‘same’ poster was actually advertising different events.

Other benefits of scale and quality included: increased ticket sales outlets; the provision of artwork to decorate venues; and, in several cases, increased audiences which had further knock-on benefits in terms of money raised for promoting groups via the sale of (or donations towards) interval refreshments.

Although mentioned less frequently, the reduction of time and associated “hassle” in organising events was considered an important benefit by some promoters, including schools and some of the other ‘highest additionality’ venues as well as some of those indicating partial additionality, for example, some of the larger-scale and/or better-funded venues as well as a couple of village halls.

Local Audience Displacement

Promoters in certain areas felt that where venues tended to be reliant on audiences from the same catchment areas there had been some diluting of local audiences between venues. This was believed to be because of the plethora of Blas events on both locally and in neighbouring areas, either on the same night or close together in the week (for example, in the Strathspey and Newtonmore/Kingussie areas, the Inverness, Ross-shire and Nairn areas, the Wester Ross and Skye & Lochalsh areas, and in Ullapool itself, where there were two events in different venues on consecutive nights).

As well as the number of events, a contributing factor mentioned here was the price of tickets (see Section Six, Community and Other Impacts), with some promoters feeling that local people would not go to more than one event because of the price. One promoter mentioned a resident of Torridon travelling to the Blas Harvest event in Aviemore rather than attending an event on the same night in Torridon.

In the small community of Glenelg, the local pub had live music on the same night as the Glenelg Hall held its Blas event, which may have split the local audience. In Lairg, a Foot and Mouth-induced delay in the economically important annual lamb sales which had been scheduled for mid August resulted in the sale coinciding with the Blas event in Lairg Community Centre, which is felt to have had an impact on reducing local audience numbers. One Lochaber-based promoter believed that there was simply too much going on this year due to Highland 2007.

One Sutherland-based promoter, noting that the number of Blas events in Caithness and Sutherland was fewer than last year, expressed concern that the Blas Festival might become too centralised in the Inverness area. This concern was in part echoed by a Ross-shire promoter who felt that their own venue had been a bit “side-lined” this year compared to previous years, in terms of the night (weekday as opposed to weekend) and profile of the act they were given by Blas. It was felt this was because the focus this year had moved more to the Inverness area.

5.0 Section Five

Audience and Visitor Impacts

Number of Events and Attendance Figures

The geographic spread of the Blas Festival has increased year on year throughout the Highlands since the pilot event in Ross-shire, Lochaber, and Skye & Lochalsh in 2004. The number of individual events also has increased each year. In 2005 the Festival took place in four areas (adding Sutherland), and in 2006 added Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey and Caithness. The 2007 Festival was the first fully pan-Highland festival, designed to coincide with Highland 2007, and included the Inverness area for the first time.

Impact of Highland 2007

Two year's of funding sourced from Highland 2007 was vital to the staging of both Blas 2006 and 2007. Highland 2007 also helped Blas in securing private sponsorship. However, the coverage of Blas in the H2007 marketing materials was necessarily more limited than Blas's own publicity. Results of the Highland 2007 Blas Survey showed that 89% of respondents surveyed at nine Blas events were previously aware that the Blas event attended was part of Highland 2007.

Table 5.1 Blas Festival Attendance Numbers 2005-07

	2005	2006	2007
Number of events	32	43	53
Attendance numbers	2,800	c.4,600	5,061

Source: Blas ticket sales 2005-07; 2005-06 from Report to The Highland Council Gaelic Committee, 12 July 2007

Audience Profile and Event Rating

Blas organisers have gathered three years' of audience data via self-completion surveys at events. Tables 5.2 to 5.4 present the main results of those surveys.

Table 5.2 Blas Festival 2005-07 – Audience Age

Age	2005 (%)	2006 (%)	2007 (%)
Under 18	n/a	9	8
18-25	n/a	4	4
26-35	n/a	6	8
36-45	n/a	15	14
46-60	n/a	37	39
60+	n/a	29	27
TOTAL	100	100	100

Source: Blas self-completion audience surveys (Base 2005-07 = 719, 1,499 and 1,538 respectively)

Two-thirds of attendees completing the survey in both 2006 and 2007 were aged over 45. Similar results from the self-completion/face-to-face surveys that were carried out at some

Blas events as part of the Highland 2007 evaluation (see Appendix 3) suggest this is probably a fairly accurate representation of the overall Blas audience age profile, although the increased tendency of older people to take part in surveys may also have some bearing on results. 12% in 2007 were aged 25 or under (cf 13% in 2006).

Table 5.3 Blas Festival 2005-07 – Audience Origin

Origin	2005 (%)	2006 (%)	2007 (%)
Local	56	58	53
Rest of Highlands	18	12	17
Rest of Scotland	8	9	9
Rest of UK	11	12	13
Overseas	8	9	8
TOTAL	100	100	100

Source: Blas self-completion audience surveys. (Base 2005-07 = 719, 1,499 and 1,538 respectively)

Based on the survey results, the origin of attendees at Blas events has shown little change between 2005 and 2007, with 70% in 2006 and 2007 living in the Highlands, and mainly in the local area of the event. The proportion of attendees from elsewhere in Scotland and overseas is consistent; the proportion from elsewhere in the UK also appears fairly static, although indicating a very slight rising trend.

Results from the Highland 2007 Blas survey (see Appendix 3) are similar to Blas's own survey results, showing 62% of respondents were from Highland, with a combined 66% from the wider Highlands and Islands area. A higher proportion (14%) of respondents to the Highland 2007 Blas survey were from overseas, including visitors from the USA, Canada, Australia, Belgium, France, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Turkey.

Table 5.4 Blas Festival 2005-07 – Audience Rating of Events

Aspect of Rating	2005	2006	2007
Rating of event (1 = did not enjoy it to 5 = excellent)	4.7	4.7	4.8
Value for money of event (1 = not good value to 5 = excellent)	4.4	4.6	4.7
How much the Gaelic content of night enhanced the experience (1 = did not enhance the experience to 5 = very much enhanced it)	4.0	3.9	4.3
OVERALL AVERAGE RATING	4.36	4.4	4.6

Source: Blas self-completion audience surveys. (Base 2005-07 = 719, 1,499 and 1,538 respectively)

Audiences were asked to rate the event they were attending by three categories: enjoyment; value for money; and Gaelic content. The average scores in each of the three categories rose in 2007, most markedly so in terms of how much the Gaelic content of the night had enhanced the audience's experience. Audience rating of the value for money of the events has also

increased, which suggests that despite the reported issue of too-high pricing of tickets (see Audience Impacts, below), those that did attend mainly felt their money had been well spent.

The overall average rating of events has increased year on year, to 4.6 in 2007.

Audience Impacts

Some promoters mentioned that their audience profiles were a bit different to what they would normally expect. This included some instances of local people attending who wouldn't normally attend events at a particular venue (for example, at the Aros Centre in Portree, and at Lochinver, Boat of Garten and Glen Urquhart halls). In others, there were noticeable increases in the proportion of visitors in the audience (for example at Eilean Donan Castle, Resolis Memorial Hut, Kyleakin Community Hall, Plockton National School of Excellence, and Kiltarlity Hall – the latter received a last-minute coach party of around 40 Irish visitors brought from Badenoch & Strathspey).

In some other cases, promoters mentioned instances of regular local attendees not turning out (Glenuig, Strontian, Ardross), and/or instances where similar events they had recently put on themselves had attracted higher audiences than Blas events, with local knowledge of acts considered a factor (eg at Arisaig, and at Ceilidh Trail events in various locations). Pricing of tickets (see Section Six, Community and Other Impacts, below) was mentioned by many of the promoters spoken to and one of the musicians as being too high, at least in terms of local residents, and was believed to have been a contributing factor in deterring some people from attending.

Additional Visitors

In 2007, various promoters reported examples of attendees at events having come to the Highlands specifically for the Blas Festival. These included festival organisers from Maine and Nevada who had travelled to the Highlands and were touring around various Blas events. Others included a US couple who had been planning to go to see a Canadian artist at Celtic Colours in Cape Breton (in October) but apparently the event was sold out so they decided to make a holiday of it in the Highlands and see her at Blas instead.

Other examples of visitors from outwith the Highlands who came specifically for Blas included people from other parts of Scotland – one Edinburgh couple booked online and came to Sabhal Mòr Ostaig in Skye specifically for Na Seòid. Others came from England – such as a couple from Cornwall visiting the Highlands for their third Blas Festival – and further afield (Canary Islands, Germany) to attend several Blas events.

Results from the Highland 2007 Blas Survey (see Appendix 3) show that for 37% of visitors attending Blas events, the event had been of at least some importance in their decision to visit the Highlands & Islands.

Other Visitor Impacts

Many promoters also suggested that as well as varying proportions of visitors, their audiences had included Highland residents who had travelled from other local areas. It is likely that at least some of these would be spending money locally on food and refreshments both before and after the event. For example, a hotel in Dornoch reported an increase in early evening meals served on the night of the Karen Matheson/Scottish Ensemble event in Dornoch Cathedral. A wedding party using Dornoch Cathedral was also believed to have stayed an additional night in the hotel to attend the Blas event, although the hotel could not confirm this due to its general busyness that weekend. However, it did report that some of its guests had attended the event, including one guest from Blackpool who had travelled to the area specifically for the event.

These findings do suggest that as the Blas Festival has become more established it is beginning to attract visitors to the Highlands, even in small numbers, including from overseas countries. It also plays a role in enhancing the stay of visitors who are in the area anyway; one US visitor holidaying in Lochinver travelled back to stay one night in Inverness specifically to attend the Karen Matheson/Scottish Ensemble event.

Visitor Expenditure

Overnight stays

Around 35% of the 164 respondents to the Highland 2007 Blas Survey (see Appendix 3) were staying away from home, with most of these on a holiday or leisure trip, and some others visiting friends or relatives or on business/work trips.

Expenditure

Based on the Highland 2007 Blas survey results, daily expenditure per day for event attendees who were staying overnight is estimated as £72 per day, including spend on Blas tickets, other expenditure at the event, accommodation and all other spend. Excluding expenditure on Blas tickets, the daily spend is estimated at £62.²

Grossing up our survey results to an estimated overall audience of 5,061 in 2007 involves making an allowance for multiple attendances by the same person (the average number of attendances at Blas events was 2.1) and average party size (2.5 adults or 2.7 including children under 16).

The importance of Blas in a person's decision to visit the Highlands and Islands is another important factor in calculating the additional expenditure benefit that is attributable to Blas. This is reported overleaf in Table 5.5.

² Official sources put average spend per night for overseas visitors to Scotland at £55, compared to £65 for visitors from England. (Tourism in Scotland 2006, www.visitscotland.org)

Table 5.5 Importance of Blas in Visiting the Highlands and Islands

Level of Importance	%
my sole reason for coming	11
a very important reason for coming	20
a fairly important reason	6
only a small reason	15
of no importance at all	48
Total	100

Taking these factors into account, the total additional visitor expenditure by people coming from outside the Highlands and Islands in 2007 was £120,000.

Blas within the wider context of Tourism in Scotland

The overseas market to Scotland has been recovering strongly since 2001, and is somewhat offsetting a downturn in domestic tourism in the last year or two. Overseas trips to Scotland increased by 72% to 2006, with a 75% increase in expenditure in real terms.

Approximately 0.5m tourism trips are made to the Highlands each year by visitors from overseas (representing 21% of all tourism trips to the Highlands), and just under one quarter of these (23%) are made by visitors from the USA and Canada, with Germany another important market. Two-thirds of overseas trips to the Highlands are made between July and September, the period which includes the Blas Festival.³

VisitScotland's current product areas for their marketing and product development include 'Culture and Heritage'. There are also suggestions on how to develop markets by aligning with VisitScotland campaigns, and/or collaborating with other events and activities operators, accommodation providers and other local businesses to put together a 'package' of experiences that can be marketed to potential visitors.⁴ It might be worthwhile for Blas to explore how such types of product development / marketing opportunities might help them to further broaden their customer base in the future.

³ Tourism in Highlands of Scotland 2005 (www.visitscotland.org)

⁴ http://www.visitscotland.org/marketing_opportunities_main

6.0 Section Six

Community and Other Impacts

Aims of Blas

To recap, the main aims of Blas are to:

- Celebrate and strengthen traditional Highland music and promote Gaelic
- Involve communities as proactive participants, and grow new audiences
- Innovate and excite
- Involve young people from the Highlands
- Be an international event, building new audiences, and have visiting artists particularly but not exclusively from Nova Scotia

Feedback from Performers

A limited number of high-profile performers as well as representatives of Ceilidh Trails (see Involving Young People below) were consulted for feedback on their involvement with Blas 2007, two of whom were involved with new projects that were conceived specifically for Blas 2007. All three performers were generally supportive of the Blas Festival, with one expressing particular support for the whole “ethos” of what Blas was aiming to achieve and one commenting that, despite initial reservations a few years ago about the idea of “creating” such a festival, they now felt it had become a very important platform for traditional music in the Highlands. Fees paid to performers were considered good, and it was felt that performers were very well looked after in terms of accommodation and subsistence.

Duncan Chisholm indicated that Blas 2007 had provided a great opportunity (KIN) that financially and technically would not have been a possibility for him otherwise. The project had been artistically very satisfying and given him a personal boost, allowing him to express himself using different media to normal, and performing in different venues. He had also learned some Gaelic phrases while touring with Blas.

Mary Ann Kennedy felt the Blas 2007 Festival had facilitated and provided a springboard for the inception of Na Seòid, a grouping of seven male Gaelic singers under her musical direction – for her personally, the facilitation provided by Blas rather than the fee involved was the most important benefit, along with the very high level of enjoyment from the gigs themselves. On the back of three very well received performances at Blas, Na Seòid is set to continue as a group with its next gig scheduled for the Celtic Connections Festival in Glasgow in January 2008.

Mary Ann’s involvement with Blas 2007 also included coordinating a performance by Ceilear, a weekly community singing project she helped set up in 2006, based in two separate Lochaber communities, Acharacle and Ballachulish, and involving around 50-60 voluntary members. Blas 2007 was the group’s first official performance invitation and it reportedly gave participants a real boost by endorsing what they do, as well as providing a rare social

opportunity for performers and audiences from both communities to come together. The group fee paid by Blas will be reinvested in the project funds.

Bruce MacGregor enjoyed the opportunity of performing for one night at Blas 2007 aboard the Jacobite Queen cruise ship on Loch Ness, and also performed in various venues last year as part of Blazin' Fiddles. Although not having a huge personal impact this year, benefits of Blas last year for the band had included reduced hassle in organising gigs, and access to more remote locations that they probably couldn't afford to go to otherwise.

Celebrating Traditional Highland Music and Promoting Gaelic

Section Two, above, outlines the programme of participants and types of event, which underline that the focus of the Festival is overwhelmingly on traditional Highland Music. Almost all consultees (94%) were in agreement that the Blas Festival celebrates and strengthens traditional Highland Music and also (91% of consultees) that it promotes Gaelic.

Evidence of the promotion of Gaelic included:

- Bilingual promotional material, eg Festival programme, website etc
- Other bilingual printed material, such as cards distributed at events, which listed key Gaelic words and phrases relating to music, and website addresses of organisations promoting the Gaelic language and culture
- Fear or Bean an Taighes presenting the events in both Gaelic and English, and encouraging audiences to say a few words in Gaelic
- Artwork containing Gaelic words decorating some venues
- Gaelic-speaking children greeting the audience on the door (at one venue at least)
- Gaelic songs performed at many events
- Audience rating of 4.3 (compared with 3.9 in 2006) in terms of how much the Gaelic content of the night had enhanced their enjoyment of the event
- Blas Festival Fun Day with Gaelic-medium activities

Involving Communities

The majority of consultees (71%) agreed that Blas 2007 was succeeding in getting communities involved in some way, and to some extent encouraging greater interest in traditional music events and other cultural events. Typical types of community involvement included:

- Promoters, committee members and other volunteers involved in pre-event activities (eg distributing brochures, preparing hall, homebaking, greeting performers, arranging refreshments for them etc) and on the night (eg tickets, front of house and stewarding, providing interval refreshments)
- Preparing decorative materials for hall (see Involving Young People below)
- As members of the audience – including in some locations evidence of new local attendees

However, some barriers to community involvement were also raised by consultees. These included, roughly in order of frequency of mention:

- Price of tickets
- Promoter input to programming of events
- Format of tickets
- Communication issues

Price of Tickets

This was by far the most frequently mentioned barrier to community involvement, and one which consultees mostly raised without being prompted. Fourteen promoters and one performer felt that ticket prices were too high and in various local areas (Caithness, Sutherland, Ross-shire, Lochalsh, Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey) evidence was given of known individuals who had not attended Blas events due to the price. Issues believed to be deterring greater (primarily local) audience attendance included:

- Full-price adult tickets (often £12) pitched too high, especially in low-income areas
- Family tickets considered high cost by some, and did not extend to families with more than two children
- Senior citizen concession (often £10) not generous enough, especially in elderly communities
- Lack of student concession (also perceived as a barrier to youth involvement)
- Lack of unemployed concession
- Lack of multiple event concession, which might encourage individuals to attend more events – ticket price combined with the number of events on offer was considered by various promoters to be a limiting factor on attendance
- Ticket prices generally higher than venues' usual prices, including for ceilidhs – can present an unfavourable comparison
- Ticket price combined with low recognition of act another limiting factor on attendance

A couple of promoters mentioned the Early Bird reductions that had been offered by Blas, but these were felt to be insufficient and/or not available for long enough to come to the awareness of many festival goers.

Promoter Input to Programming of Events

A number of promoters mentioned that they would have preferred to have some or more say in the programming of acts to their venues, and also the nights on which events were to be held. In some cases it was felt that programming had split audiences (see Section Four, Local Audience Displacement), including in specific locations such as Ullapool where, while recognising that the cost of transporting crew etc may have been an issue, promoters felt that two events on consecutive nights was not ideal in terms of maximising audiences. Another promoter felt that some of the events in their area were too similar in nature and would have welcomed some opportunity to feed into this beforehand.

Although promoters acknowledged that a nine-day festival would always include weekdays as well as weekends, some felt that more input, including in terms of being given the opportunity to highlight to Blas other local/regular events taking place on particular nights, would have been helpful.

Format of Tickets

Around five promoters and one ticket outlet mentioned that the format of tickets and the numerous variations in ticket prices printed on them caused confusion when selling tickets – this was viewed as problematic particularly for local outlets (such as shops, post offices etc) and in terms of time involved when selling tickets on the door.

Communication Issues

Overall, the majority of promoters and venues consulted seemed very happy with the communication and support they had received from Blas personnel in the run-up to and during their events, and many spontaneously praised how well-organised, efficient and helpful the Blas team had been. Several mentioned that any queries or problems raised had been dealt with promptly.

In terms of maximising achievement of its aim of involving communities as proactive participants Blas might wish to consider fine-tuning its mainly very successful communications with promoters, including promoter input to event organisation where desired. This should reduce the few odd instances this year where a promoter felt slightly dictated to or, conversely, less well supported/consulted/informed than they would have liked.

Involving Young People

As outlined above in Section Two, Overview of Blas, the Blas 2007 Festival actively involved large numbers of young people as performers and participants in a range of events (Open Stage, Fun Day, Runrig launch, as acts/support acts in Blas main events, art workshops with schoolchildren etc).

In terms of youth involvement overall, including actually helping to organise events and attending them, around 41% of consultees felt that Blas was going some way to achieving this, while others were not sure or disagreed that this was the case. Several promoters commented on how difficult it was generally to get young people involved with any type of community activity, and that this was not just an issue for Blas.

Some types of youth involvement in Blas 2007 are described under the following headings:

- Ceilidh Trail Performances
- Event Organising
- Schools
- Audience

Ceilidh Trail Performances

As in previous years, Blas 2007 provided an opportunity for Highland-based young people involved in traditional music to perform as part of the Festival. Six groups of Ceilidh Trail musicians with around six to 10 performers in each group and mainly aged 16-22, performed at least once and more often twice in six of the eight geographic Highland areas. Each performer was paid a fee by Blas in addition to the fee they receive for participating in individual Ceilidh Trails which last between two and four weeks and take place in July and August prior to the Blas Festival.

Other benefits for most Ceilidh Trail performers included the opportunity to perform in larger, better-equipped (in terms of lighting, sound etc) venues that would normally be too costly for them to access, and conversely also smaller remote venues that would normally not be considered due to prohibitive travel costs etc. Young musicians welcomed the opportunity of sharing the billing and playing as support acts to higher-profile professional musicians, which in turn exposed them in many cases to new audiences.

Young musicians also enjoyed being dealt with on a similar level as the professionals in terms of accommodation, meals, travel expenses etc. Blas-generated publicity was on the whole regarded as a positive element in terms of further raising the profile of the Ceilidh Trails, although one organiser suggested that more space could be given to Ceilidh Trailers in the Blas brochure, when compared with that given to professional performers.

In addition, around 40 young musicians, many of them drawn from the Ceilidh Trails and/or local fèisean, also performed alongside professional musicians in a large-scale concert (Harvest) which was staged in Aviemore Highland Resort and Fort William Nevis Centre during the festival.

The Caledonian Ceilidh Trail took part in the Blas Festival for the first time in 2007. Feedback from the musicians and organiser involved was wholly positive. Benefits included the raising of profile, increased publicity, additional fee and the opportunity for young performers to play alongside both professional musicians and other young Ceilidh Trail musicians – the last at the Runrig Beat the Drum event on 18 August 2007 at which Blas officially launched its festival programme with performances by local musicians on a side-stage.

A few promoters mentioned how successful they felt the Ceilidh Trails themselves were in terms of involving young people – more so in some cases than the main Blas Festival events.

Event Organising

There was evidence of young people helping out on a voluntary basis at events, some of them taking tickets on the door, or acting as stewards in larger venues, or distributing and collecting audience questionnaires. For example, at one event in Inverness Cathedral two teenage girls from the local fèis played the bagpipes outside the venue as the audience were arriving, while in Lochcarron three children from the local Gaelic-medium unit greeted people in Gaelic at the door. At Roybridge, three young people enjoyed acting as ‘runners’ on the night.

Schools

Five secondary schools in the Highlands plus the National Centre of Excellence in Traditional Music in Plockton were used as venues for Blas 2007. Feedback was received from five of these schools, and there was good evidence of the involvement of young people, which included:

- distributing posters to local outlets
 - helping on door at events
-

- ordering refreshments and meals for band members
- making Gaelic- and music-related murals to decorate the hall
- being instructed by the sound crew how to set up sound and lighting
- (in one school) formation of a promoters' group of Higher Music students to enable them to learn about various aspects of staging events.

Also as part of Blas 2007, three 17-18-year-old students who had just left the Plockton school had the opportunity to perform as a trio in support of Kathryn Tickell to a full-house (capacity 180) in the Aros Centre in Portree.

Feedback from schools was generally positive, although one first-time venue would have appreciated more input before the event about Blas generally and what was involved in putting on and publicising the event. Two of the schools suggested that Blas could perhaps look at doing more to involve the students in advance of the event by coming to the school and doing a workshop with them.

It was also suggested by one that short afternoon performances specifically for schoolchildren could be introduced, or a musical tuition workshop by band members. Potential opportunities to have increased school involvement this year included a school ceilidh band who would have welcomed an opportunity to perform, and another venue which is set in the grounds of a school whose promoter suggested that more could have been done to engage the school children, eg by allowing them free entry to an event.

The Gaelic Arts Strategic Development Forum, Fèisean nan Gàidheal and artists and youth work representatives worked with local schoolchildren throughout the Highlands on visual artwork or other decorative items, such as lanterns, for display in Blas Festival venues, for example in Applecross, Lochcarron and Badenoch & Strathspey venues.

Audience

Tickets for school children at Blas Festival events are priced at a flat rate of £5, and Blas organisers actively promoted awareness of this to all schools in the Highlands by writing to head teachers in advance of the Festival. Despite this, the results of the Blas audience self-completion survey suggest if anything a very slight downturn in the proportion of young people aged up to 25 in the audience – 12%, compared with 13% in 2006.

While some venues reported a good proportion of young people in the audiences (eg Elgol, Ullapool, Resolis, Clashmore, Invermoriston), others, including a few of the school venues, were disappointed at the turnout in the audience of local schoolchildren, including in some areas those involved with local fèisean (eg Glengarry). One teacher suggested that low recognition of acts might have been a factor and that including wherever possible locally known and/or school performers as support acts would almost certainly increase attendance by local people, including schoolchildren. Another pointed to local and parental apathy generally in the area, and suggested that low attendances by schoolchildren were irrespective of Blas efforts to encourage their interest by promoting young artists playing traditional music.

To Innovate and Excite

Most consultees (70%) agreed that Blas in some way 'innovates and excites'. Examples of this included:

- In some areas, creating a 'buzz' before events
- Excitement created during events
- Individual aspects of programming showing innovation, eg Duncan Chisholm's KIN, promoting artists from outwith the Highlands, such as Kathryn Tickell
- New features, such as a touring promotional band and open stages for little-known performers

One musician commented on the difficulty of being innovative in the traditional Highland music scene, and felt that Blas had done well this year in this regard.

Being an International Event

Section Five, Audience and Visitor Impacts, outlines the results of the Blas audience self-completion surveys and includes anecdotal feedback from consultees on evidence of visitors attending their events.

It seems that as well as promoting artists from Canada and some other countries, Blas is also beginning to attract new audiences from overseas, and there should be potential to build on this through targeted overseas marketing, including web links from other international festival sites such as Celtic Colours, and alliances with other tourism / activity operators, as described in Section Five above.

Creating a 'Feelgood Factor'

All but one of the consultees (97%) agreed that Blas 2007 had created a 'feelgood factor', including among organisers, performers and audiences. In most cases, even where audiences were small, promoters were very happy with the quality of the performances, and the reception of these by the audience. Audience enjoyment of the events is summarised by the self-completion survey results in Section Five, Audience and Visitor Impacts.

Suggestions for Improvements

Consultees were asked to suggest any improvements that could be made to future Blas festivals. Some of these are summarised below:

- Revise / reduce ticket prices, include reduced price multiple event ticket
 - Revise format of tickets and reduce number of variations in ticket prices
 - Save costs by reducing amount of publicity material (eg brochures) sent to venues to realistic amounts for distribution
 - Do even more for young performers, eg by involving local school groups such as Gizzen Briggs etc
 - Give promoters more input to programming of events to maximise attendance potential
 - Repeat this year's very useful Blas representatives meeting with PAN promoters
-

- Continue with more 'wild nights' such as Shooglenfity to attract younger audiences to a dance situation rather than a sit-down concert or formal ceilidh
- Investigate the possibility of some kind of festival club (or clubs) to provide focal points for musicians and audiences after events
- Include more dance in the programme, eg step dancing

Appendix 1

Blas Organisation

Donna (Cunningham) Macrae – Blas Festival Director
Brian Ó hEadhra – Blas Artistic Director
Arthur Cormack – Fèisean nan Gàidheal Director
Nicola Marshall – Fèisean nan Gàidheal Development Officer
Kirstie Anderson – Gaelic Arts Strategic Development – Audience Development Manager

Ceilidh Trailers

Caledonian Ceilidh Trail / HC TMC Coordinator (Margo MacLennan)
Fèis Chataibh (Ken Houston)

Musicians

Bruce MacGregor
Duncan Chisholm
Mary Ann Kennedy

Promoters / Venues

Ardross Community Hall (Sylvia Tarrant)
Aros Centre (David Shipman)
Astley Hall, Arisaig (Ann Martin)
Ballachulish Village Hall (Chaz Stewart)
Bealach, Applecross (Derek MacLennan)
Beaully Arts Group (two individuals on night)
Ben Nevis Inn (Marion McNeilly)
Boat of Garten Community Hall (Valerie Fairweather)
Culloden Academy (Alison MacKenzie)
Dornoch Cathedral (Susan Brown)
Durness Village Hall (Mary MacKay)
Eilean Donan Castle (David Win)
Elgol Village Hall Association (Scott Henderson)
Farr Village Hall (Alasdair Forbes)
Gairloch High School (Beth Hunter)
Glen Urquhart Public Hall (Jennie MacFie)
Glenelg and Arnisdale Community Hall (Clive Pearson)
Glengarry Community Hall (Lea MacNally)
Glenmoriston Millennium Hall (Clare Levings)
Glenuig Village Hall; Strontian Centre (Eoghan Carmichael)
Kiltarlity Village Hall (Eunice Ramsden)
Lochcarron Village Hall (Christine Houser)
Lochinver Village Hall (Alex Dickson)
MacPhail Centre (Fran Harrison)
Nairn Academy (Fiona Sellar)
National Centre of Excellence, Plockton (Dougie Pincock)
Nevis Centre (John MacLennan)
Resolis Memorial Hut (David Gilbert)
Roy Bridge Memorial Hall (Helen Critchley)
Seaboard Memorial Hall, Balintore (Linda Durrand)
SEALL (for Sabhal Mòr Ostaig; Kyleakin; PAN – Duncan MacInnes)
Thurso High School (Colin Frame)
Torridon Village Hall (Glyn Meredith)
Ullapool Entertainments (Elizabeth Beer)

Others

Dornoch Castle Hotel

Appendix 2

Blas Festival 2007: Social and Economic Impact Study
Appendix 2 – Blas 2007-08 Expenditure

Description	Spend (£)
Blas Programme	
Harvest Contract to Fèis Rois	35,000
Artists' fees	86,922
Ceilidh Trailers, other local performers	5,400
Accommodation and meals for artists (including Ceilidh Trailers)	16,000
Stage/Concert Management/Fear- or Bean-an-Taighe	3,180
Ceilidh Trailers travel expenses	1,000
International artists' travel and expenses	9,000
Ceilidh Trails	53,600
Marketing	
Branding/Logo/Website	900
Publicity Materials	14,000
Advertising	8,000
Runrig Launch Event Costs	5,500
Production Costs	
Festival Director	23,500
Artistic Director	10,500
Press & PR Manager	3,000
PA & Lighting	27,000
Venue Hire / Commission to Promoters	16,000
Telephone / Fax / Email / Postage / Stationery	1,000
Action Group Costs	2,500
Other PR	2,000
Insurance	1,000
Royalties	500
Management and Other Costs	
Fèisean nan Gàidheal Management Fee / Contingency	10,000
Social and Economic Impact Study	5,000
TOTAL	340,502

Appendix 3

Blas Festival 2007: Social and Economic Impact Study
Appendix 3 – Highland 2007 Blas Survey Results

Preliminary analysis results of Highland 2007 Blas Audience Survey, carried out by Macpherson Research at nine Blas 2007 events.⁵ The results are based on a sample of 164 completed questionnaires. The base is all respondents unless otherwise stated.

Origin

Area	%
Highland	62.2
Moray	1.8
Western Isles	1.8
Orkney	0.6
Rest of Scotland	5.5
Rest of UK	14.0
Overseas	13.9
TOTAL	100.0

Age

Age bracket	%
Under 25	8.6
25-34	8.6
35-44	17.8
45-54	25.8
55-64	29.5
65+	9.8
TOTAL	100.0

Gender

	%
Male	38.0
Female	62.0
TOTAL	100.0

Mean Party Size

	Number
Adults (mean)	2.5
Children under 16 (Mean)	0.18
Total Party Size (Mean)	2.68

⁵ Guthan a' Chuain, Nairn; Piping Concert, Inverness; Dàimh & Dòchas, Nairn; Shooglenifty, Farr; Harvest, Aviemore; Karen Matheson & Scottish Ensemble, Inverness; Shooglenifty & Kathryn Tickell Band, Fort William; TMSA Young Trad Musicians Tour 2007, Lochcarron; Flook & Anam, Plockton

Trip Profile

Type of trip	%
Day trip from home	64.0
Holiday/leisure trip, staying away from home	29.9
Visiting friends or relatives	4.9
Business/work trip, involving overnight stay	0.6
Other	0.6
TOTAL	100.0

Main Type of Accommodation (overnight stays only)

Accommodation type	%
Hotel	8.5
Guest House / B&B	33.9
Rented Self-catering	16.9
Hostel / bunkhouse / bothy	3.4
Caravan / camping / motorhome	8.5
With friends or relatives	13.6
Own holiday home	10.2
Other	5.1
TOTAL	100.0

Note: base = 59

Importance of Blas event in decision to visit the Highlands & Islands

	%
My sole reason for coming	11.1
A very important reason	20.3
A fairly important reason	5.6
Only a small reason	14.8
Of no importance at all	48.1
TOTAL	100.0

Note: base = 54

Have you stayed overnight in Highlands & Islands on holiday before?

	%
Yes	70.9
No	29.1
TOTAL	100.0

Note: base = 55

Blas Festival 2007: Social and Economic Impact Study
Appendix 3 – Highland 2007 Blas Survey Results

How many times?

	%
Once	12.5
2-5 times	22.5
More than 5 times	65.0
TOTAL	100.0

Note: base = 40

Likelihood of returning to Highlands & Islands on holiday in next 5 years

	%
Very likely	75.9
Likely	9.3
Unlikely	3.7
Very unlikely	0.0
Don't know	11.1
TOTAL	100.0

Note: base = 54

Number of days attending Blas 2007 events

Number of days	%
1	53.7
2	20.1
3	13.4
4	4.3
5	3.7
6 to 8 days	4.8
TOTAL	100.0

What would you have been doing had you not attended this event?

Type of activity	%
At home (TV, housework, gardening etc)	53.3
Dining out	8.7
Pub / socialising	7.3
Exercise class / other event or activity	7.3
Working	5.3
Don't know	5.3
Holiday / travelling elsewhere	4.7
Sightseeing	3.3
At other Blas event	2.7
Other	2.0
TOTAL	100.0

Note: base = 150

How first heard about the Blas event

Method	%
Word of mouth	26.2
Radio programme / feature / advert	3.1
TV programme / feature / advert	0.0
Tourist brochure	4.9
Tourist Information Centre	0.6
Internet website	20.7
Poster / flyer / event leaflet	23.2
Street banners	0.6
Local newspaper	8.5
Previous Blas attendance / direct from Blas / Crann Tàra band	4.3
Celtic Colours Festival	1.2
Other	6.1
TOTAL	100.0

Previous awareness of Highland 2007

	%
Yes	85.3
No	14.7
TOTAL	100.0

Importance of Highland 2007 in decision to visit the Highlands & Islands

	%
My sole reason for coming	11.6
A very important reason	25.6
A fairly important reason	7.0
Only a small reason	20.9
Of no importance at all	34.9
TOTAL	100.0

Note: base = 43 (non-Highland & Islanders)

Previous awareness that Blas event was part of Highland 2007

	%
Yes	89.4
No	10.6
TOTAL	100.0

Note: base = 141

How first heard about Highland 2007

Method	%
Word of mouth	35.0
Radio programme / feature / advert	7.9
TV programme / feature / advert	4.3
Tourist brochure	5.7
Tourist Information Centre	0.7
Internet website	10.0
Poster / flyer / event leaflet	13.6
Street banners	2.1
Local newspaper	13.6
Other	7.1
TOTAL	100.0

Note: base = 140