Aodán Mac Póilin passed away in December 2016. His passing was marked by the Irish language community and the community at large. Many spoke of his courage and integrity, his strategic vision, his pioneering approach to cross-community engagement, his expertise across a wide range of interests, his great facility to make presentations interesting and entertaining, and his abiding sense of enjoyment and fun.

Aodán was a passionate and articulate advocate for the Irish language and spent his life working with, and for, the language. He was by his own account a ‘late bloomer’, in that he came to the language as an adult learner. He moved, with his wife Áine Andrews, to the Shaws Road Gaeltacht in west Belfast in the mid-70s, and raised his family there. He was the first Chair of the first Irish-medium school, the forerunner of the Gaelscoil movement in Northern Ireland.

Aodán, as Director of the ULTACH Trust, laid much of the groundwork for cross-community engagement with the language in the early 1990s. He understood the need to meet with groups on the ground, to provide accurate and accessible information, and the space for people to engage with language on their own terms. His working life was guided by the principle “that the language is, should be seen as, the common heritage of anyone in this society, and should be accessible to anyone who wishes to engage with it.”

In the 1990s, the Trust made a significant contribution to the growth of Irish-medium education, through directly funding schools, many of which were on the brink of closure, and supporting others until they reached viability criteria. Aodán made the case for Irish-medium education to the Department of Education in a way that was difficult to ignore or reject.

Under his leadership, the Trust also played a critical role in improving provision for the arts and in television broadcasting. Aodán’s prescience, led, for example, to early lobbying for the inclusion of TG4, along with RTE 1 and 2, on fledgling NTL cable services which were being introduced in the early 90s. He argued for better terrestrial access to TG4 through boosting transmitter signals, while also understanding that a case had to be made for TG4’s position on the digital spectrum to future-proof access to the channel. Later, he made the case to DCAL to run a television training course which would provide trainees to serve a future Irish language broadcasting sector. Since his passing, it has been widely acknowledged that he played a key role in securing the Irish Language Broadcast Fund. There is also recognition that the Trust’s strategic interventions led to the establishment of an Irish language production sector, the injection of an additional £3 million per annum into the local economy and an additional half million per annum of BBC expenditure on Irish language programming. Many have also pointed to Aodán’s successive interventions on the issue of the BBC’s public service provision for the Irish language community.

Aodán represented the Trust on a wide range of organisations. He was active in the European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages and the Community Relations Council, was chair of the first Irish-medium school in Northern Ireland, Bunscoil Phobail Feirste, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (the Council for Irish-medium Education) and the Irish Language Broadcast Fund. He sat on the boards of Foras na Gaeilge (the cross-border Irish language implementation body), the Columba Initiative (now Colmcille), Cultures of Ireland, Northern Ireland Screen, the Broadcasting Council for Northern Ireland, and the Seamus Heaney Centre, Queens University Belfast.

He wrote and lectured extensively on various aspects of the Irish language, literature and culture. He edited *Styles of Belonging: the Cultural Identities of Ulster* (1992), *Ruined Pages, New Selected Poems of Padraic Fiacc* (1994), *The Irish Language in Northern Ireland* (1997), and co-edited *Bás in Éirinn* (2012). He was also a highly accomplished translator of Irish language literature, in particular the poetry of leading Irish language poets.

Aodán was a founding member of Colmcille, the organisation which fosters cooperation between Gaelic Scotland and Ireland. He was a member of the editorial panel of *The Great Book of Gaelic* (2002) and had a lifelong interest in the cultural and historic links between both countries.

He was a regular attendee at the Celtic Media Festival, rarely missing the opportunity to explore and celebrate the Celtic languages and cultures. He was a lively and passionate contributor to panel discussions at the festival, and his love for language, literature and song was always strongly evident.

Aodán also contributed many articles to academic journals, magazines, books and the local press during his career. A collection of his essays on language and cultural issues is being prepared by ULTACH Trust.