



Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

Petition Number: [PE1581](#)

Main Petitioner: Duncan Wright on behalf of Save Scotland's School Libraries

Subject: School Libraries

Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to set out a new national strategy for school libraries which recognises the vital role of high quality school libraries in supporting pupils' literacy and research skills.

Background

The provision and financing of school libraries is a matter for local authorities. There is no statutory requirement for a local authority to have school libraries. They must however ensure the provision of "adequate and efficient education" (s.1, Education (Scotland) Act 1980) and also "adequate provision for library services" (s.163, Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973).

[Research carried out in 2013](#) by Robert Gordon University, on behalf of the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) noted that:

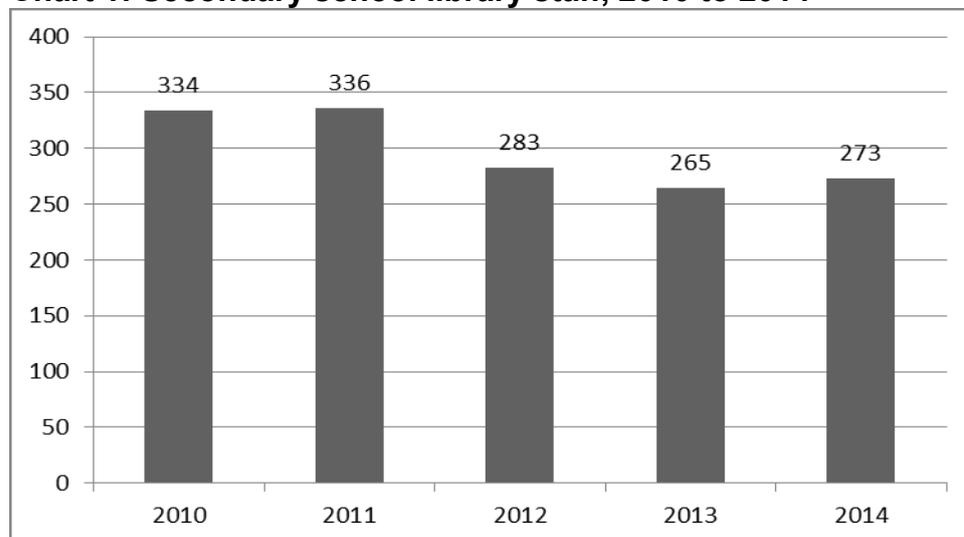
"All secondary schools have access to library services either through a dedicated school library, a joint school and community library or from a central authority library service. The majority are staffed by professionally qualified librarians."

The report reviewed the international evidence on the impact of school libraries and commented that there is a, "particularly high level of professional staffing, compared with other areas of the UK." However, the main conclusions of the report were that school libraries make a positive impact on:

- Higher test or exam scores equating to academic attainment: this includes reading, language arts, history and maths
- Successful curriculum and learning outcomes, including information literacy
- Positive attitudes towards learning: including increased motivation, self-esteem, and wider reading for pleasure.

The number of school library staff serving in Scottish secondary schools over the last five years is set out in the chart below. Numbers fell in 2012, since when they have remained relatively stable.

Chart 1: Secondary school library staff, 2010 to 2014



Source: Teacher Census supplementary data for relevant year. Available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/teachcenssuppdata> (Almost all school library staff are in secondary schools. There have been between 1 and 4 library staff in primary schools over the last five years.)

Some local authorities have proposed making cuts to school library services - see for example Argyll and Bute ([Herald 3 October](#)). This is part of proposals for cuts across the range of council services.

In 2015, the Scottish Parliament's Local Government and Regeneration Committee concluded in its [report on the 2015/16 draft budget](#), that the total local government allocation for 2015/16 was, "increasing in cash terms but essentially flat in real terms." However, local authorities are expecting financial austerity in the years ahead. The actual funding position for 2016/17 may not be known until January, because of the timing of the UK Government spending review.

Scottish Parliament Action

In February, Ken MacIntosh MSP asked a series of questions about school libraries (S4W-24554, 24553 and 24552). He asked: how the Government is demonstrating its support for school libraries (response below), what the collective budget was for school libraries (not collected centrally) and how many have closed (not collected centrally).

Scottish Government Action

Asked in a PQ how the Scottish Government is demonstrating its support for school libraries, Alasdair Allan MSP, said:

"The Scottish Government is committed to improving literacy levels across the country as part of the drive to raise attainment and reduce educational inequalities. Local authorities have full autonomy to make decisions concerning school libraries in their areas. We provide support to libraries by funding the Scottish Library and Information Council, the independent national advisory body for the library and information sector. The council actively engages with local authorities about their provision of public and school library services and provides self-evaluation tools to support development of good quality library provision across Scotland. Ministers welcomed the research undertaken by Robert Gordon University in 2013 on behalf of the Scottish Library and Information Council which showed the value of school libraries in terms of supporting learning across the curriculum and raising attainment." (S4W-24554, Ken MacIntosh. Answered 3rd March 2015).

This year there is a Scottish Government funded pilot scheme to make every child in Scotland a library member automatically. Local authorities across Scotland have signed up to support the "[Every Child A Library Member](#)" project, which will be funded by the Public Library Improvement Fund, provided by the Scottish Government to support improvement and innovation in public library services across Scotland. Commenting on this in August, the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon said:

"Libraries can empower communities – often in our most deprived areas where we know that young people can have lower levels of literacy and numeracy. Access to books and learning materials will help us to make sure that every child has the opportunity to get excited about reading." ([BBC News](#))

Camilla Kidner
Senior Research Specialist
27 October 2015

SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@scottish.parliament.uk

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.