



# A Response to Public Petition PE01581: Save Scotland's School Libraries

Scottish Youth Parliament  
December 2015

## Introduction

The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) represents all of Scotland's young people. Our Vision for Scotland is of a nation that listens to and values the participation of children and young people. Our goal is to do our utmost to make this vision a reality. We see this as vital to ensuring Scotland is the best place in the world to grow up.

Our democratically elected members listen to and recognise the issues that are most important to young people, ensuring that their voices are heard by decision-makers. We provide a platform for young people to discuss issues that are important to them, and support them to campaign for the changes they wish to see at community, local and national levels.

SYP's Values are:

Democracy - We are youth-led and accountable to young people aged 14-25.

Rights - We are passionate about ensuring that young people are aware of their rights and ensuring that local and national government deliver policies that ensure those rights are fulfilled.

Inclusion - We are committed to being truly inclusive and work tirelessly to ensure that we represent young people from every community and background.

Political impartiality - We constructively engage with, and challenge, decision-makers from all political parties to ensure the voices of young people are at the heart of policymaking in Scotland.

## Our Approach

The Scottish Youth Parliament welcomes the opportunity to comment on the public petition 'Save Scotland's School Libraries'. Our views on the petition are informed by current SYP policy and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the principles of which underlie all of SYP's work. The views of SYP's Education and Lifelong Learning Committee were sought when forming our response to ensure that young people's voices are heard on this issue.

## General comments

As a fundamentally rights-based organisation, our mission and values are grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). As such, we welcome the



general principle of this petition as we believe that it upholds and promotes the rights of children and young people with regards to education, particularly in relation to article 29 of the UNCRC which states that education should work towards ‘the development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential’<sup>1</sup>. SYP agrees that the provision of high-quality school libraries, with professionally trained librarians to provide support and guidance to students, is an absolutely necessary resource to enable young people to achieve their fullest potential both in and outside of education. We acknowledge that there are positive initiatives to encourage reading and improve literacy outwith schools, such as the [Every Child a Library Member](#) project; however, these initiatives should complement rather than replace school library services. We assert that there is a need for research into how cuts in library services have had an impact on literacy and learning.

We offer some more specific comments about points made in the petition below.

### Educational inequality

The petition asserts that recent cuts have led to a postcode lottery of the level of library service in schools, the consequence of which is that school pupils are suffering educational inequality. Article 28 of the UNCRC states that a child’s right to education should be ‘on the basis of equal opportunity’<sup>2</sup>; this right might be undermined if there are varying levels of library services in schools. We believe all pupils in Scotland should have access to high quality school library services.

### Role of libraries in closing the attainment gap

Educational attainment has been a key area of focus for our 2015 national campaign, POVERTY: See It Change It. We fundamentally believe that addressing the current gap in educational attainment is crucial to eradicating child and youth poverty.<sup>3</sup> We therefore particularly welcome the petition’s comments on the valuable role libraries play in closing the attainment gap in schools. SYP holds the view that attainment and achievement should not just be based on examination results but on a wider conception of achievement. As such we are pleased to see the petition’s acknowledgment that libraries are not just influential in closing the academic attainment gap and supporting the curriculum but also ‘support students to develop skills for life’ and help to ‘increase self-esteem’, which we view as equally important aspects of a young person’s educational and personal development.

### Access to library resources and to a professionally qualified librarian

We welcome the petition’s mention of the need for libraries to support access to resources both virtually and outside of school hours, and support its concern that some councils have reduced librarians’ duties to term-time only. As the petition states, research has shown that libraries help to increase self-esteem and promote positive attitudes about

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, ‘The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child’: [http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Publication-pdfs/UNCRC\\_PRESS200910web.pdf](http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Publication-pdfs/UNCRC_PRESS200910web.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, ‘The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child’: [http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Publication-pdfs/UNCRC\\_PRESS200910web.pdf](http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Publication-pdfs/UNCRC_PRESS200910web.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Youth Parliament, ‘It’s Not A Choice: An analysis of young people’s perceptions of poverty and rights’: [http://www.syp.org.uk/img/its\\_not\\_a\\_choice/Its\\_not\\_a\\_choice\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://www.syp.org.uk/img/its_not_a_choice/Its_not_a_choice_Final_Report.pdf)



learning. Pupils should have access to high-quality library resources and support all year round rather than just term-time to comply with the right to equality of opportunity as outlined by article 28 of the UNCRC. For instance, children and young people from deprived areas may not have access to high quality resources outwith school.

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