

PE1581/D

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Mr Ned Sharratt
Assistant Clerk
Public Petitions Committee
T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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Ar faidhle/Our ref: Pol/11625
18 December 2015

Dear Mr Sharratt

CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE1581 – SCHOOL LIBRARIES

Thank you for your letter of 25 November seeking the Government's view on the Scottish Parliament Petition PE1581 and the discussion of the petition which took place at the Public Petitions Committee meeting held on 24 November. Petition PE1581 calls for 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.

In accordance with the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 the responsibility for the delivery of education rests with individual local authorities. The 1980 Act enables local authorities to make such arrangements as they consider necessary for the management of a library service provided by them including the accommodation and distribution of books and other materials. They may also enter into arrangements with the managers of public libraries. In discharging these functions it is for authorities to determine the requirements for their school libraries, including the recruitment and deployment of school library staff, taking into account local needs while maximising the benefits of local resources.

Scottish Ministers welcome the opportunity offered by this petition to confirm their recognition of the important role school libraries play in supporting reading attainment, encouraging positive attitudes to reading, enhancing information literacy skills and improving access to knowledge for our learners. Through the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC), we continually seek to promote the value of libraries across all sectors and to provide leadership to the library sector. SLIC's activity includes coordinating and promoting national service developments and providing quality standards for library services, including both public and school library services.

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The Committee and the petitioner may be interested to know that the National Strategy for Public Libraries, published in June of this year, was developed by SLIC, in collaboration with a number of partners. The strategy was endorsed by both the Scottish Government and COSLA.

As with public libraries, it is important that school libraries continue to adapt to meet the needs of their users and the wider attainment aims of their schools. It is in this context that local authorities and schools must continue to consider the role of their school libraries within wider improvement plans and strategies at local and school level. The Scottish Government, through the Scottish Attainment Challenge and wider policies on attainment and literacy, will continue to encourage local authorities and schools to make full use of school libraries as they work to raise attainment and improve literacy rates.

The petitioner has called for the collation of information on school libraries as part of the national school census. I can confirm that the number of staff employed in school libraries is already collated on an annual basis as part of that process. Details of the 2014 national school census can be found at: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/teachcenssuppdata/teachcensus2014>. The 2015 data covering school library staff is not yet available.

The Petitioner has also highlighted the importance of recognising school libraries within Education Scotland's inspection framework. Again, I can confirm that it would be normal practice for inspectors to engage with school librarians during the inspection process to ascertain the role they play in supporting pupils.

Scottish Ministers do not believe that it would necessarily be most appropriate for them to lead on the development of a national strategy for school libraries, akin to SLIC's strategy for public libraries. We would nevertheless be happy to be involved in any such work which was to be progressed by others, and look forward to seeing the views of COSLA, the EIS, UNISON and the Scottish Youth Parliament in this regard.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Shirley Anderson
Scottish Government Policy Officer