



Chris Hynd
Committee Assistant
Public Petitions Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

22 December 2015

Dear Mr Hynd

RESPONSE TO PETITION PE1851

The Scottish Book Trust strongly supports Petition PE1851 calling on the Scottish 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.

There is a plethora of evidence to support the claims made in this petition. A strong example is the 2013 research from Robert Gordon University, carried out on behalf of the Scottish Library and Information Council. The report, "Impact of School Libraries on Learning", draws on a range of international evidence to highlight the educational outcomes which are impacted on by school libraries. The benefits noted include increased academic attainment across the curriculum; successful learning outcomes including information literacy and higher quality project work; and positive attitudes towards learning. The report also summarises the key attributes of school libraries which contribute to the positive impacts on learning. These include a full-time, qualified librarian and a library which has the resources to support the curriculum as well as appeal to students' leisure needs.

These findings have been endorsed as being highly relevant in the Scottish context in a number of influential reports. In the 2014 report by the Standing Literacy Commission on the Scottish Government's Literacy Action Plan, Robert Gordon University's research was directly cited and supported. In addition, Education Scotland's 2015 report, "The 3-18 Literacy and English Review", highlighted the importance of trained school librarians in developing and supporting a school reading culture and in supporting the associated educational benefits such as information literacy and research skills.

Scottish Book Trust runs a number of programmes for schools which are provided free of charge and reach around 185,000 children and young people in Scotland each year. Much of our work in secondary schools is delivered in collaboration with school librarians. These qualified individuals help us to identify the best events and activities to run within a school and work with us and other school staff to deepen the impact of our work. School librarians are a vital part of how we ensure our programmes make a difference in Scotland's schools.

The Scottish Government is pursuing ambitious aims for Scottish education and rightly so. Central to those aims are improving attainment across the board and closing the attainment gap in the context of a curriculum which focuses on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. We know that literacy and reading for pleasure are key contributors to successful educational outcomes, but we also know from Scottish data that literacy levels have decreased in recent years. The data also tells us that children in more deprived circumstances are less likely to achieve the expected levels of reading and writing than Scotland's least deprived children (Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy, 2015).

The OECD report on Improving Schools in Scotland, published this month, is of the view that Curriculum for Excellence is at a "water-shed" moment. It calls for Scotland to be bold, and to continue to pursue both excellence and equity in our education system. It also reminds policy-makers to pursue those ambitions by using evidence to support their decisions.

There is little doubt that school libraries and school librarians contribute to positive educational outcomes both within and beyond the curriculum, and are a vital part of how schools can benefit from the services organisations such as Scottish Book Trust can offer. The evidence makes that clear. We also know that the future of school library services is not secure and we know that their availability can be patchy and therefore unequitable. We therefore urge the Scottish Government to develop a national strategy which recognises the role school libraries and school librarians play in achieving the ambitions of Scottish education and protects their ability to do so.

Yours sincerely

Marc Lambert
Chief Executive
Scottish Book Trust