

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

22 December 2015

Dear Mr Hynd

RESPONSE TO PETITION PE1581

I am writing on behalf of the Society of Authors which has 645 members in Scotland and over 9,450 nationwide. We are deeply concerned by the proposed cuts to your school library services.

School libraries are not merely rooms with shelves full of books, and school librarians are not just people who stamp books and make sure they are put away on the correct shelf. Those authors who spend time in school libraries or who have had the occasion to work with school librarians, know well the breadth and scope of a good school library and the challenges that so many excellent school librarians meet with skill and good humour, each and every day. We do not need to be convinced of the necessity of having a skilled librarian in every school, running a well-stocked library.

Many adults have no real understanding of why a library is important or why a school library should be run by a qualified librarian, rather than an assistant, or pupils, or even by English teachers. A library can enhance the life of all the pupils in a school. It is a safe haven for some children, a place where they can find space and some time out. A trained school librarian will have a breadth of knowledge of contemporary and classic titles that are relevant, not just for use with the curriculum, but also a knowledge of which fiction or non-fiction books would suit a particular young person at this point in their life, and might turn them from a non-reader to an avid one. There are many instances where one book, the right book at the right time, has opened a young person up to the world of literature and made them a reader for life. Few people, even English teachers, have the knowledge of the breadth of reading material available to do this; or the time to lead all kinds of national and international activities (the current UK champions of the Kid's Lit Quiz is a Scottish team, Hamilton College, who will compete in the international finals in New Zealand) to encourage readers of every age and ability. Librarians, however, have the time and expertise to organise [Patrons of Reading](#), author visits and workshops, Book Week events, reading challenges and shadow book prizes.

These are only a few of the extra events that are organised through school libraries and without this resource the lives of many of our young people would be the poorer. With many local public libraries disappearing and many households where books are not available, the school library is the only place where children can access reading material. In some households parents are not readers or cannot afford to buy books. We should not disadvantage these children even more.

[President Philip Pullman CBE](#)
[Chair Daniel Hahn](#)
[Chief Executive Nicola Solomon](#)

There are proven links between Reading for Pleasure and academic attainment which other petitions have referred to, but it should not be forgotten that reading books can help develop empathy for others, as well as giving the reader a better understanding of the world around them, past and present. Children can safely experience diverse lifestyles and life choices that we might hope they will never come across. They can gain an understanding and empathy for others and an understanding of why some choices will inevitably lead to unavoidable consequences. That is as important a life skill as any academic subject, if we want to develop a community in the future that cares about others.

By not ring fencing the budget for school libraries and trained librarians, or by forcing school librarians to share their time between schools or to be completely replaced by volunteers without the expertise or time to do the job properly, we will be letting down the next generation. We need an understanding of what we are losing and how difficult it might be to replace our school librarians. Our school librarians, whose passion and enthusiasm has often led them to work far beyond their job description are being left feeling undervalued and over stretched - yet they still try to provide the service that our children deserve.

We are facing a situation in Scotland where those making the decision, whether overtly, by neglect or by stealth, are disposing of these valuable and necessary resources. We need to ensure that this coming generation are not going to find themselves without the libraries and access to books in the same way that we enjoyed as children. What kind of message are we sending to our young people if we allow school libraries to become obsolete? Do we really want a nation of children whose cultural needs are not met and whose values are dictated by (often adult) reality TV and video games?

If Scotland is to become the place we want it to be, with young people who are articulate, grounded and with an education we can be proud of, regardless of their situation or geographic location; we need to act now and place the library at the heart of each and every school.

Yours sincerely

Linda Strachan
Chair of the Society of Authors in Scotland