

PE1581/K

Petition PE1581 - Save Scotland's School Libraries

Response by Yvonne Manning and Duncan Wright on behalf of Save Scotland's School Libraries

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the written submissions regarding Petition PE1581 – Save Scotland's School Libraries.

It is heartening to read the high level of understanding of the value of and appreciation for school librarians, school libraries and school library services, and the enthusiastic support for the development of a National Strategy for School Libraries. It should be noted that the overwhelmingly enthusiastic responses indicate that support for the petition is not confined to librarians and the public, but also from the key organisations and agencies involved in the delivery of Education in Scotland.

Many of the submissions develop and extend the argument presented in the petition. It was interesting and welcome to read the strong argument relating school libraries to the fundamental rights of young people as stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The inequality that is stressed throughout the response from the Scottish Youth Parliament, builds on the implication within the petition of the threat of a 'postcode lottery' situation in Scotland.

The response from UNISON emphasises the school librarians' role of supporting learners and teachers in information literacy, which has become increasingly more important in the digital age. Not only is the impact on educational outcomes and digital literacy outlined, but interestingly the school librarians' role of helping to protect young people through safe use of the internet.

The responses from The Society of Authors, Literature Alliance Scotland, Scottish Book Trust and The School Library Association make compelling argument as to the school librarians' impact on literacy, in particular reading for enjoyment. They warn about the wider consequences on our young people with the loss of the breadth of knowledge and experience of school librarians. These literary organisations rely on school librarians to take forward many of their initiatives and events. Without this partnership, organisations such as Scottish Book Trust could not deliver on the Scottish Government's literacy agenda with the same depth of engagement. School librarians organise author visits to schools and through their network of contacts and knowledge offer students unique experiences from well-known and new writers, which impact on their reading and writing. In this way, school librarians are important in the promotion of Scottish culture to young people.

We welcome mention of other countries, specifically Finland and Denmark, who recognise school librarians play a key role in their world class Education system. A National Strategy for School Libraries will minimise the current fragmented and

inconsistent approach to school library provision and show how school librarians contribute to the Scottish Government's ambition for young people in Scotland.

Dorothy Williams' response to the Petitions Committee meeting indicates that the international statistical evidence gives us a confident indicator that school libraries make a positive impact on attainment and achievement. Although much of the convincing data originates from USA, Canada and Australia, we support the recommendation to SLIC contained in the recent research by RGU to consider collecting quantitative assessments of the impact of Scottish school libraries.

The support of the SPTC shows a clear understanding of the value of school librarians, how they offer meaningful educational experiences for their children and are key in delivering the literacy agenda.

The EIS response is very comprehensive and identifies a broad range of areas where school librarians impact on improving the literacy of children and young people. The school librarians' role in the GIRFEC agenda; closing the attainment gap and the support that school librarians offer learners with additional support needs and more vulnerable students, is highlighted. School librarians not only provide stimulating learning environments for young people, they offer their teaching colleagues space and facilities as well as current resources for professional development. School librarians contribute to developing young people's skills for life and work. The EIS acknowledges this important role in providing access to well organised, relevant information and resources to maximise informed choices.

The Scottish Government recognises the importance of school libraries in literacy attainment and achievement, and we welcome the value they attach to this sector. With regard to the request for the collation of information on school libraries, the data already collated does not indicate how many staff employed in school libraries are professionally qualified librarians and there is no detail about how many are shared between schools. A National Literacy Strategy for School Libraries would pull together the Scottish Government's expectations that local authorities and schools "...make full use of school libraries as they work to raise attainment and improve literacy rates." as well as the expectation that school librarians are fully engaged in the inspection process.

Overwhelmingly the responses support the development of a National Strategy for School Libraries in Scotland. We are disappointed that a response was not received from COSLA as we believe they are important stakeholders in this process.

We understand that the Scottish Government is happy to support the implementation of a National Strategy for School Libraries if it is led by an appropriate national body. As petitioners we also believe this to be appropriate action to take and we envisage that the National Strategy for School Libraries will dovetail with the principles and elements of the excellent Public Library strategy recently launched, *Ambition & Opportunity, A Strategy for Public Libraries in Scotland 2015-2020*. It is our belief that this method has been successful and would be an appropriate way forward.

We note however that in order for the impact of a National Strategy for School Libraries to be maximised that the appropriate funding and investment is made available. Equally any action taken should be of an immediate nature in order to address the pressures that school libraries, school librarians and school library services are currently experiencing.

We look forward to receiving the result of the committee's considerations and the next course of action.