

# LITERATURE ALLIANCE SCOTLAND

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19 December 2015

Michael McMahon MSP  
Chair  
Public Petitions Committee  
The Scottish Parliament  
Holyrood  
EDINBURGH  
EH99 1SP

Dear Sirs

## **PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE PETITION PE01581: SAVE SCOTLAND'S SCHOOL LIBRARIES**

We write on behalf of Literature Alliance Scotland, which brings together the principal literature organisations in Scotland as listed in Appendix 1, in support of the petition 'Save Scotland's School Libraries', which has been lodged by Mr Duncan Wright. We agree with the points made in the petition and strongly support the call for a national strategy for school libraries in Scotland. We would submit the following points:

1. Literature Alliance Scotland ([www.literaturealliancescotland.co.uk](http://www.literaturealliancescotland.co.uk)) shares the concern that Scotland's network of school libraries, staffed by professional school librarians, has been gradually fragmenting and submits that urgent action is required to stem this decline. The process of fragmentation has become more acute in recent years as local authorities have made choices on which services to reduce in response to financial pressures. The result is that Scotland is creating a situation where the school library service young people receive depends on where they live, something over which they have no choice or control. This cannot be the way to plan for the next generation of Scots to have equal opportunities. Scotland was renowned among other European countries decades ago for its strong sustainable networks of both school libraries and public libraries. We should not risk weakening our networks at the very time when we will need them more.
2. The recent OECD Report, *Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective*, 2015, notes (p.64) that performance in reading in primary and secondary schools has declined from 2012 to 2014. International evidence shows the vital role of school libraries in improving literacy and encouraging reading: it is well known, for example, that school students will often approach the school librarian for assistance rather than a teacher. With Curriculum for Excellence being described as 'at a watershed' in the OECD Report, it will be all the more important to have good school libraries available to school students if Scotland is to fulfil its potential and offer a world-class education system. Elsewhere in Europe, Finland attributes its top performance in PISA reading results to its excellent library system. Recognizing the importance of school libraries in this process, steps are currently being taken there to build up existing school library provision to bring it up to the standard of other parts of their library system.
3. In common with other comparable countries, the Scottish Government has a vision for Scotland to be a world-class digital nation by 2020 (<http://www.digitalscotland.org/about-digital-scotland/>). School libraries, staffed by professionally qualified librarians, will be vital

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in equipping the new generation of school students and 'digital natives' in Scotland with all the necessary information literacy skills to meet the needs of the changing digital world.

4. In developing a national strategy for school libraries in Scotland, the opportunity should be taken to examine how other countries are developing their school library systems in response to the digital age and to consider various existing models. For example - Denmark, where the Education Act requires every school to have a school library, decided in 2013 to make its school libraries into learning centres where the school librarian, the learning instructor, advises, trains and guides school students in relation to digital information and printed books. Naturally, Scotland must decide on the model that best suits its own requirements, but a consideration of how other advanced countries are addressing this issue would be illuminating.

We strongly encourage the Scottish Government to support the call to develop a national strategy for school libraries in Scotland to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and then to implement the strategy in a sustained and consistent way across the country.

Yours sincerely

Dr Ann Matheson  
Chair

Dr Robyn Marsack  
Vice-Chair

Enc. Appendix 1

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## APPENDIX 1

### LITERATURE ALLIANCE SCOTLAND MEMBERSHIP AT DECEMBER 2015

- Association for Scottish Literary Studies
- Association of Scottish Literary Agents
- Book Nation/Borders Book Festival
- CILIPS (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland)
- Edinburgh International Book Festival
- Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature Trust
- The Gaelic Books Council
- Moniack Mhor
- National Library of Scotland
- Playwrights' Studio Scotland
- Publishing Scotland
- The Saltire Society
- Scots Language Centre
- Scottish Book Trust
- Scottish Language Dictionaries
- SLIC (Scottish Libraries and Information Council)
- SLAM (Scottish Literary and Arts Magazines)
- Scottish Society of Playwrights
- Scottish PEN
- Scottish Poetry Library
- Scottish Storytelling Forum
- Scottish Writers Centre
- Society of Authors in Scotland
- Universities Committee for Scottish Literature
- Wigtown Festival Company
- Writers' Guild of Great Britain (Scottish Region)

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