

PE1581/O

Petitioner Letter of 2 March 2016

Petition PE1581 - Save Scotland's School Libraries

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

We once again welcome the opportunity to respond to the written submissions which have been submitted to Petition PE1581 – Save Scotland's School's Libraries since our original response sent on 19th January 2016.

We are extremely disappointed that the responses from the Association of Directors of Education Scotland (ADES) and COSLA, both of which are important stakeholders in this process, show little understanding of the problems currently facing school libraries or have tried to engage in the process in a structured and meaningful way. Whilst we accept that ADES may feel it is not appropriate for them to lead on the development of a National Strategy for School Libraries (what the Public Petitions committee asked of them) we were extremely surprised that their curt response offered no support for the development of a National Strategy on School Libraries. ADES published the *Charter for Scottish Education* earlier this year which sets out a series of points they believe can put Scotland on the journey to being a world leader in education. One of the main points was for 'Every child to receive a core set of educational experiences'. Within the report ADES state "In a small country such as ours, given the importance of education, no post code lottery of opportunity should exist or be allowed to develop." As developing a coherent National Strategy for School Libraries would stop a "post code lottery of opportunity" existing in regards to pupil's access to school libraries we hope you can understand the frustration we felt when reading this response.

We found the response received from COSLA equally frustrating. We are unsure why COSLA have made reference to VOCAL (the national association for culture and leisure managers) in their submission. A large number of school librarians are not represented by this organisation as they fall within the remit of education, not culture and leisure. Within their response COSLA accept that some authorities will protect school libraries and some will choose not to. This is fundamentally why we are calling for a National Strategy on School Libraries in order that young people across Scotland are afforded the same educational opportunities. It is extremely disappointing that COSLA does not share this wish.

Since our petition was brought to Parliament the situation regarding school libraries in Scotland has worsened considerably as a result of a number of devastating cuts in the latest round of local authority budget cuts. This has included halving the number of school librarians and reducing the school's library service in Falkirk Council and the deletion of all ten school librarians in Argyll and Bute. The decision in Argyll and

Bute will mean children and young people across the entire region will not have access to a professionally qualified librarian in school. On the islands of Mull, Tiree andIslay pupils will have no access to a library service at all.

The number of library staff working in schools in Scotland has dropped by 26% in the last 5 years. These recent cuts will increase this figure further therefore we believe that this petition is more important than ever and urge the committee to continue to work towards the establishment of a National Strategy for School Libraries in Scotland.

We believe that it may be possible to make progress in this regard by approaching the Scottish and Library Information Council (SLIC) and asking them to lead on the implementation of a National Strategy for School Libraries. SLIC successfully delivered the National Strategy for Public Libraries in Scotland and we feel that a National Strategy for School Libraries could dovetail effectively with the implementation of the Public Library Strategy.

We also reiterate our request from our meeting at the Public Petitions Committee Meeting on 24th November which asked for the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning to publicly welcome school libraries' demonstrable contribution to educational attainment. We believe that the decision taken in Argyll and Bute represents a watershed moment in Scottish education which requires comment from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning. It is no longer acceptable for the Scottish Government to maintain that this is a 'local authority issue'. School Libraries and School Librarians are currently under immense pressure *nationally* and require support from the Scottish Government.

We recommend any action taken should be of an immediate nature and we look forward to receiving the result of the committee's considerations and the next course of action.