5th. August 2026

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Màiri McAllan MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic
Scottish Parliament
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Via email: CabSecforECG@gov.scot

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

I am writing to congratulate you on your portfolio as Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic, and to introduce the work of CILIPS (The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland), the professional body representing library, information, and knowledge specialists across the nation.

CILIPS works to advocate for the transformative power of libraries and their staff in our communities, schools, higher education institutions, and many other organisations and sectors, as well as providing training, qualifications and support. You will no doubt have plans to work closely with our partners at the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) and we want to assure you that you can also rely on our support with your work.

Libraries are among Scotland's most heavily used public assets and librarians are one of the most trusted professions in society. From the world-class collections of the National Library of Scotland to our vital public library branches providing equitable access, reducing digital exclusion and social isolation, boosting economic growth and improving health and wellbeing, to school libraries directly driving literacy and closing the poverty-related attainment gap, our libraries are essential civic and social infrastructure.

When adequately resourced, libraries contribute significantly to government priorities and deliver remarkable return on investment with £6.95 social value returned for every £1 spent on them, with evidence showing that banking does the opposite. Scotland's public libraries are legally protected and welcome over 14 million visitors a year, nearly four times the number who attend Scottish Premiership football matches annually.

After years of severe local authority budget pressures, these essential services face growing geographic disparities and incremental erosion. We welcome the impactful funding offered via the Public and School Library Improvement Funds, backed by national strategies, but we need more action to ensure libraries can deliver at a local level.

Around 10% of libraries have been lost since 2013, and 612 full-time equivalent staff in the same period. Spend per head on library resources across Scotland varies between just 50p and £2.41, yet in Ireland it is £3 and in the Netherlands it is over £25. Scotland's libraries are being allowed to fall behind their European neighbours, despite their growing popularity, and they need robust investment. Librarians of all types are also champions of intellectual freedom and are ethically

opposed to censorship of all forms, but they need to be resourced and empowered to meet this rising challenge.

Meanwhile, school librarians play a specialist, irreplaceable role in championing reading for pleasure, literacy, and supporting curriculum delivery. They also support digital innovation, information literacy, political literacy and promote wellbeing. However, school library staff have no protection and in the last 15 years have seen services decimated with just 16% of local authorities offering full professional librarian coverage in their secondary schools and several authorities having no school librarians at all. Meanwhile, 38% rely on alternative staffing models involving assistants, teaching staff or volunteers, despite extensive evidence that professional librarians are essential for literacy, information skills and wellbeing. Recently, national government in Sweden stepped in and made it a legal requirement to have a school library staffed by a trained librarian, and we believe this is the model Scotland should follow.

We believe that libraries and librarians in Scotland could thrive with the support of a few high-level actions:

1. Back libraries and their staff to be fundamental partners in delivering Scottish Government priorities by ensuring they have appropriate funding via local authorities and continued national strategic guidance.

2. Support the implementation of the Beyond Adequate advisory group recommendations, published by SLIC. Crucially, this includes establishing a Universal Library Offer to provide clear national standards for core library services across all 32 local authorities, moving beyond the outdated and ambiguous statutory requirement of an ‘adequate’ service.

3. Deliver on the statement of intent for a new National Strategy for School Libraries in Scotland and consider what actions could be taken to protect the school library workforce from further cuts.

Thank you for taking the time to consider these suggestions, and we would welcome the opportunity to meet with you at some stage to discuss how we can work together to secure the future of Scotland’s library services.

Yours Sincerely

Sean McNamara

Director, CILIP Scotland