Learning, Lending, Liberty:
Can school libraries be engines for youth citizenship?
Exploring how school libraries in Scotland support political literacy.
Executive Summary

This report outlines the contribution of school library services in Scotland to the political literacy and information literacy of young people in the run up to the Scottish Independence Referendum 2014 and the General Election 2015. It looks at what activities school library workers engaged in, the barriers that library services face when seeking to support information literacy relating to politics and examples of best practice. It also features a contribution from YoungScot relating to the political information needs of young people. Recommendations are made about how school libraries may build on their existing contribution to political and information literacy through connections with the Curriculum for Excellence.

The study asked three questions:

1. How did school libraries support the provision of information and information literacy in the run up to the Scottish Independence Referendum and General Election?
2. What barriers do school library services face when providing information and information literacy relating to political events?
3. What are the information needs of young people in relation to political participation?

The report:

- Explores the ways in which school libraries supported young people's information and information literacy needs in the run up to the Referendum and General Election;
- Identifies examples of best practice with a case study from Aberdeenshire;
- Highlights some of the key issues library workers face when seeking to engage in work related to politics;
- Makes recommendations for library staff, schools, local authorities and professional bodies relating to how to improve support for political literacy.

Key points
Survey results from approximately a third of Scotland's secondary school library staff indicate that there are different levels of political information and information literacy provision across schools, and there is a definite lack of clarity about what they can and cannot do in terms of information provision and involvement in discussion about political issues with young people. There is also variation in the degree to which information literacy is embedded in the curriculum and the role that libraries and library staff play in the education of pupils. A common theme emerging is that library staff are keen to support pupils' educational and social development, including their political and information literacy, and some pockets of good practice have been identified.

How did school libraries support the provision of information and information literacy in the run up to the Scottish Independence Referendum and General Election?

From the survey and interview results, a wide range of methods of information provision and information literacy support relating to politics were identified. Some information was provided specifically to support political literacy development in the run up to the Referendum and the Election, whereas information literacy support and some other forms of information are provided by the libraries at all times of year.

Information provision	Information literacy support
• Displays (e.g. General Election) • Access to the internet • Setting up and running dedicated web space information, including election apps and websites • Books relating to democracy, elections and political power • Ephemeral material and manifestos - collections of material on both sides of the referendum debate • 'Read Around...' lists • Providing library resources to support lessons • Materials for debates and research topics (e.g. PSE extension work) • "The Day" website and "Issues Online"	• Courses at all stages S1 - S6 • Including political topics in information literacy (e.g. apartheid, political systems) • Using political topics as the focus of research projects and discursive essays to develop political and information literacy • Sessions delivered in the library • Embedded in S1&2 literacy classes delivered by class teachers • RISK programme (Research and Information Skills) course • Trip to Aberdeen University library for training • Ad hoc workshops for Advanced Higher students • Tutor time

What barriers do school library services face when providing information and information literacy relating to political events?

Many respondents were keen to support young people's political literacy and participation through information provision and information literacy but have been unable to do so. They identified a number of barriers they have experienced or fear they will experience when they seek to engage in supporting pupils' political participation. These barriers relate to personal perceptions, school practice and culture, and policy:

Personal	Practice	Policy
• Not feeling confident or knowledgeable enough • Personal discomfort with engaging in political discussion • Not feeling it is relevant to library work • Not feeling it is a priority	• Lack of culture of library engagement in school • Lack of time and resources • Not feeling it is appropriate • Risk aversion of schools • Complexity of the issues • Lack of age-appropriate resources about democracy and political issues and participation	• The perceived policy of neutrality of the library • Council policies around politics • Lack of clear guidance about what information provision and support is appropriate

What are the information needs of young people in relation to political participation?

Library staff reported that many young people were very enthusiastic about the Referendum and that there was a high degree of interest in democracy and politics. This was less the case in the run up to the General Election, but nevertheless young people were still interested in the event and sought information. The topics young people wanted to know about included:

- The main political parties;
- Who their constituency representatives were;
- History of the electoral process;
- Manifestos from the main parties;
- Political issues;
- What the outcomes and repercussions of the events were likely to be.

Survey participants also identified the ways in which young people's education would benefit from information literacy skills relating to political information, including helping them to identify bias in different information sources which would benefit them in all aspects of life.

Recommendations

Recommendations are made relating to supporting library staff to engage in political literacy support through information provision and information literacy. These include:

- Producing guidelines specifically for school libraries relating to political information and information literacy with links to useful resources;
- Supporting school library services and staff to advocate for the value of political literacy support through information literacy;
- Producing evidence to demonstrate the contribution of school libraries to political literacy and participation including within the Curriculum for Excellence.

Most significantly, the library and information profession needs an evidence base to help advocate for the value of school library services, with evidence relating to the specific impacts of libraries in different areas of life. This will help to make the case for the statutory provision of school libraries, which will in turn help library services to support young people's educational outcomes as well as their ability to participate in democratic life.

About the project

The Learning Lending Liberty project was funded by the CILIP Information Literacy Group. The findings are based on surveys and interviews conducted with school library workers across Scotland, and data provided by YoungScot. The report was written by Lauren Smith from the University of Strathclyde, with contributions from Catherine Foster from the University of Strathclyde and the team at YoungScot. Stakeholder input was provided by CILIPS and the members of the Scottish Information Literacy Community of Practice.