

**Learning Lending Liberty:
Can school libraries be engines for youth citizenship?
Exploring how school libraries in Scotland support political literacy
Final Report
February 2016**

Introduction

This report presents the findings of research which explored the role of school libraries in helping young people to participate in politics. The project sought to identify the role libraries played in supporting young people's political participation in two major political events – the Scottish Independence Referendum 2014 and the UK General Election 2015. The project also explored the information and information literacy needs of young people relating to political participation. The findings of the survey responses, interviews and case study highlight the ways in which information literacy provision can play a key role in helping young people to meaningfully participate in politics.

The turnout for the Scottish Independence Referendum in 2014 was 85%¹, and among the most engaged and interested citizens were young people². Studies have found that people aged 14-17 sought the most information about the Referendum; one study found that 89% of young people consulted key sources for information on the referendum, including social media, television, radio, newspapers and publicity material. The most popular sources of information among young people were social media, television and radio³.

Young people's involvement in the Scottish Independence Referendum in 2014 was particularly significant because it was the first time that 16 and 17 year olds were able to vote in a national (or indeed local) referendum or election. This posed challenges, including how to ensure that information provided on how to register and vote was clear, accurate and neutral⁴ as well as supporting young people to develop knowledge, understanding and opinions about political issues in an appropriate way. Many teachers, youth workers and youth organisations across Scotland worked to support young people to develop their political literacy and participate in the referendum⁵, but there is a lack of knowledge about how young people handled the amount of information they were provided. A wealth of information about the Referendum was available, and there was some concern that people would struggle to with the volume of information and with ascertaining which information

¹ Electoral Commission (2014) Scottish Independence Referendum: Report on the referendum held on 18 September 2014 http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/179812/Scottish-independence-referendum-report.pdf

² Eichhorn, J. Paterson, L. MacInnes, J., Rosie, M. (2014). Results from the 2014 survey on 14-17 year old persons living in Scotland on the Scottish independence referendum. <https://www.aqmen.ac.uk/sites/default/files/YoungScotsBriefing060614.pdf>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Electoral Commission (2014) Scottish Independence Referendum: Report on the referendum held on 18 September 2014, p.45. http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/179812/Scottish-independence-referendum-report.pdf

⁵ Ibid, p.44

was accurate and reliable⁶. Another unknown is the extent to which school libraries in Scotland are able to support young people's political literacy, in relation to the Referendum as well as other political events, such as the General Election held in 2015. The political literacy of young people and their ability to engage in political debate was identified as a key aspect of education around the Referendum, and the Electoral Commission produced guidance for anyone with a responsibility for - or interest in - young people's education - to support political literacy⁷. Additionally, Education Scotland⁸ produced a resource to support political literacy through the Scottish school curriculum. The development of political knowledge and literacy was connected to the Curriculum for Excellence in several subject areas.

This research gap represents one of many gaps in knowledge relating to the role and impact of school libraries. Recent studies have identified a lack of research into the impact of school libraries in Scotland⁹. Research in this area is of particular relevance in the face of significant proposed cuts to school library budgets in Scotland and cuts to education more widely across the UK.

This report aims to provide school library workers with a resource to advocate for the value of school library services for the development of politically literate young citizens who are able to meaningfully participate in political processes, building on the idea that information literacy and political literacy are inextricably linked¹⁰. The report may also serve as a research output that can be used as an advocacy tool and example of the role of libraries in supporting democracy.

The study identifies the extent to which school libraries are currently engaging with work to support political participation, citizenship and political literacy through information provision and information literacy instruction.

Acknowledgements

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⁶ Cairney, P. (2014). A guide to making a decision on how to vote in the Scottish Independence referendum. *Democratic Audit UK*. <http://www.democraticaudit.com/?p=7758>

⁷ Electoral Commission (2013). Political literacy and the referendum on independence for Scotland. http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/157328/Scottish-referendum-education-briefing-June-2013.pdf

⁸ Education Scotland (2013). CfE Briefing 14: Curriculum for Excellence: Political Literacy. http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/CfEBriefing14_tcm4-813894.pdf

⁹ Williams, D., Wavell, C., Morrison, K. (2013). Impact of School Libraries on Learning: Critical review of published evidence to inform the Scottish education community. http://scottishlibraries.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/SLIC_RGU_Impact_of_School_Libraries_2013.pdf

¹⁰ Alexander, R.C. (2009) Political literacy as information literacy, *Communications in Information Literacy*, 3(1), pp. 9-13.

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Background and context

The democratic role of libraries

The importance of political literacy and political participation for the health of democratic society is well-documented¹¹. The role of political information and knowledge in enabling people to make informed political decisions is also widely acknowledged¹². Furthermore, the effects of political socialisation through access to information, information use, and discussion about political issues, have been found to have an impact on not only children's capacities to engage in political life, but has also been found to improve parents' engagement with political information and their development of political knowledge and formation of political opinions¹³.

The role of libraries in supporting democracy and political participation is an area of librarianship which many authors have discussed, often citing major works such as Ranganathan's *Five Laws of Library Science*¹⁴ and Gorman's *Enduring Values*¹⁵. Much has been written about the democratic potential of library and information science, presenting information provision, education and public space among the ways in which libraries contribute to democratic ideals¹⁶. Considerable emphasis is placed on the ways in which libraries can actively engage people with democratic participation through helping them to become independent learners with strong IL skills, which will enable them to find the information they need in order to successfully participate in political life¹⁷.

However, this valuable contribution to democracy is often not viewed as a central role of libraries, even during the recent Scottish Independence Referendum and General Election. Much attention was paid to the deluge of information citizens experienced, particularly in the run up to the Referendum, but there was little focus on *how* people worked their way through the information to come to decisions, and if they felt they were able to do so as a result of their information literacy capacities. The role of libraries and library staff did not play a central role in helping people to become politically informed, and this work tends not to be viewed as a core element of service provision, particularly in the current context of limited public funding and resources.

¹¹ Norris, P. (2002). *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.22.

¹² Moy, P. & Gastil, J. (2006). Predicting Deliberative Conversation: The Impact of Discussion Networks, Media Use, and Political Cognition. *Political Communication*, 23, pp. 443–460.

¹³ McDevitt, M. & Chaffee, S. (2002). From Top-Down to Trickle-Up Influence: Revisiting Assumptions About the Family in Political Socialization, *Political Communication*, 19(3), pp. 281-301.

¹⁴ Ranganathan, S.R. (1931) *The Five Laws of Library Science*. Madras: Madras Library Association.

¹⁵ Gorman, M. (2000). *Our Enduring Values: Librarianship in the 21st Century*. Chicago: ALA Editions.

¹⁶ Buschman, J. E. (2007). Democratic Theory in Library Information Science: Toward an Emendation. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, 58 (10), pp. 1483–1496.

¹⁷ Jacobs, H. and Berg, S. (2011). Reconnecting information literacy policy with the core values of librarianship. *Library Trends*. 60(2), pp.383 - 394. DOI: 10.1353/lib.2011.0043

Library funding and resources

It is particularly important to acknowledge the current context for school libraries in Scotland before exploring the extent to which they do or do not contribute to areas of education and development; any recommendations for improvement are made with the awareness that these improvements may not be practicable given the current political and economic context.

School libraries are not statutory in Scotland, and are facing severe funding cuts as part of cuts to spending on secondary education. In Scotland, these funding cuts are manifesting in the redundancy of school librarians, splitting one member of staff across a number of school (and sometimes public) libraries, reduction in staffed opening hours and cuts to resource budgets. This makes supporting pupils' development and delivering the goals of the Curriculum for Excellence even more challenging and is likely to have a detrimental effect on school outcomes and pupil performance.

Studies have demonstrated the valuable role of school libraries and librarians in the intellectual development of learners^{18 19}. A number of studies have identified a correlation between several factors of school library provision and intellectual capacity in students. These include:

- The number of library staff;
- The presence of full time, qualified librarians;
- The frequency of library instruction activities;
- Collaboration between teachers and librarians;
- The size and quality of library collections;
- Subscriptions to databases;
- Flexibility in scheduling;
- School library spending.

There is currently no national strategy in Scotland for school libraries, and this is believed by many to result in a postcode lottery with regard to the level of school library service received, which represents a form of educational inequality²⁰. This report makes some suggestions relating to potential content for a national strategy in relation to supporting the Citizenship strand of the Curriculum for Excellence with a focus on information literacy and resource provision for political participation. It is hoped that a national strategy would promote the value and contribution of school libraries to education and be a core element of school library advocacy.

¹⁸ Todd, R. (2012). School Libraries and the Development of Intellectual Agency: Evidence from New Jersey. *School Library Research*, 15.

http://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/aaslpubsandjournals/slr/vol15/SLR_SchoolLibrariesandDevelopment_V15.pdf

¹⁹ Williams, D., Wavell, C., Morrison, K. (2013). Impact of School Libraries on Learning: Critical review of published evidence to inform the Scottish education community. http://scottishlibraries.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/SLIC_RGU_Impact_of_School_Libraries_2013.pdf

²⁰ Scottish Parliament (2015). Public petition no.PE01581: Save Scotland's School Libraries. <https://www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/petitionPDF/PE01581.pdf>

School library advocacy

Groups such as Save Scotland's School Libraries have taken action including launching a petition through the Scottish Parliament²¹, which led to a Public Petitions Committee meeting on 24th November 2015²².

In response to the cuts to school libraries, the Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) has joined with several other organisations and groups to develop the SHOUT ABOUT campaign for school libraries²³. The School Library Association has backed the Scottish school libraries petition mentioned above, and has developed a set of standards for secondary school libraries which emphasises the need for an appropriate number of trained and qualified professional library staff working in schools.

CILIP Scotland is a separate organisation affiliated to CILIP which addresses advocacy and policy making in devolved matters, including education.

CILIPS' School Library Advocacy Group has developed an advocacy strategy²⁴, which identifies several areas in which school libraries contribute to the success of the Curriculum for Excellence, Scotland's curriculum for learners aged 3-18, which was implemented in state schools in 2010-11. The Curriculum for Excellence focuses on four key capacities: developing successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. The Advocacy Strategy connects these themes to the work of school libraries. Although there is some evidence to demonstrate the value of libraries in contributing to academic achievement, as discussed in the previous section, there is less evidence to demonstrate the contribution of school libraries to the development of responsible citizens.

This study aimed to identify the work being done in Scottish school libraries as a starting point for further research in the area to demonstrate the value of school libraries in supporting citizenship through the provision of political information and relevant information literacy skills development.

CILIP in Scotland has released the following statement:

We support the Government's ambition for Scotland to be the best place to grow up and learn and contend that professional school librarians are integral to its realisation. High quality learning opportunities should include access for all school pupils to a professionally trained librarian and information expert with a knowledge of learning styles who is:

- *Located within the school and available throughout and beyond the school day;*
- *Managing a safe, secure and supportive environment for formal and informal learning;*
- *Responsible for curating resources to support the curriculum;*
- *Partnering teachers in supporting delivery of the Curriculum for Excellence;*
- *Engaging pupils in information seeking and discussion;*

²¹ Ibid.

²² Scottish Parliament (2015). Public Petitions Committee 24 November 2015.

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=10237>

²³ <http://www.schoollibraries.org/>

²⁴ Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals in Scotland (2015). School Libraries.

<http://www.cilips.org.uk/school-library-statement/>

- *Promoting information literacy across the curriculum; and*
- *Developing critical thinkers, enthusiastic readers and ethical users of information.*

CILIPS continues to advocate for the retention of school libraries and school librarians in every secondary school in Scotland.

A recurring theme in the advocacy work of the various groups and individuals seeking adequate school library provision is the need for evidence to support the assertions made regarding the educational and social value of school libraries and library staff. There is also often a lack of detail available about the work actually taking place in school libraries, to illustrate the unique contribution made by libraries within school settings. This study seeks to contribute to addressing these gaps in knowledge, and has the following aims:

Aims

1. To demonstrate the value of school libraries and information literacy provision to young people's political literacy;
2. To understand what information needs young people have when looking for information and communicating about political events, and identify how library staff can support these needs;
3. To build on the understanding of the practical role of libraries and information literacy in supporting political participation.

Objectives

The project sought to achieve the aims listed above through the following objectives:

1. Identify how school libraries (within the wider school environment) supported the provision of information and information literacy in the run up to the Scottish Independence Referendum and the General Election;
2. Identify the barriers library services faced when providing information and information literacy relating to these events;
3. Identify the information needs of young people in relation to political participation through quantitative research and a case study;
4. Produce materials identifying the role of libraries and information literacy in supporting political participation, which can be used to demonstrate the value of libraries and information literacy to schools and wider society.

Research Questions

Based on the aims and objectives, three research questions were developed:

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?

Methods

Three methods of data collection were used within the study: a survey, interviews and secondary data provided by YoungScot.

Survey

The survey was produced in Qualtrics, an online survey tool, and was distributed online, via mailing lists, Twitter, Facebook, emails direct to staff members and via library service managers. The survey received 174 responses in total, with 83 completed surveys. The completed responses represent approximately a third of Scottish school library staff; Scottish Government data indicates that there were 249 members of school library staff across Scotland in 2015²⁵.

Interviews

Follow-up interviews were conducted by telephone/Skype with six participants. The interviews lasted between half an hour and an hour and were semi-structured, with all participants being asked the following questions:

- Can you think of any examples of activities (of any size) you were involved in at school in the run up to the referendum and general election?
- What do you think might be some benefits of being involved in activities around political participation?
- What do you think might be the reasons for schools and libraries not getting more involved in work around political participation?

Other areas of discussion focused on finding out more about the specific activities, issues and themes raised within the participants' survey responses.

The findings from the interviews contribute to answering two of the study's research questions:

1. In the run up to the Referendum and the General Election, what provision was made in schools to help pupils understand and participate?
2. How did school libraries support this provision through access to information and information literacy instruction?

Secondary data

YoungScot were able to provide data about searches which led to their website and information they provided in the run up to the Referendum and Election. This data contributes to answering the research question *"What are the information needs of young people in relation to political participation?"*

²⁵ Scottish Government (2016). Teacher census, supplementary data, Table 3.17.

<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/teachcenssuppdata/teachcensus2015>

Survey Findings

This section summarises the results of the survey that was circulated as part of the Learning, Lending, Liberty Project, between May and July 2015.

The survey aimed to gain an insight into the activities of school libraries and library workers in Scotland. The results of the survey informed the development of interview schedules as well as providing valuable data for this report.

The survey included questions about the opening hours and staffing of school libraries, availability of resources relating to political information, teaching and information literacy provision, the relationship between the Curriculum for Excellence and library activity, and perceptions about the role of libraries in relation to citizenship and political participation. The survey text is included in Appendix A.

Information about the schools and library workers

Regions of respondents

The table below indicates the responses to this question:

| Answer | Response | % | Answer | Response | % |
|-------------------|----------|--------|---------------------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Edinburgh City | 11 | 11.34% | Shetland Islands | 2 | 2.06% |
| Aberdeenshire | 8 | 8.25% | Clackmannanshire | 2 | 2.06% |
| North Ayrshire | 6 | 6.19% | East Dunbartonshire | 2 | 2.06% |
| Dundee City | 6 | 6.19% | Inverclyde | 2 | 2.06% |
| North Lanarkshire | 6 | 6.19% | East Ayrshire | 1 | 1.03% |
| Glasgow | 5 | 5.15% | Fife | 1 | 1.03% |
| Perth & Kinross | 5 | 5.15% | Na h-Eileanan Siar (Western Isles) | 1 | 1.03% |
| Aberdeen | 5 | 5.15% | West Lothian | 1 | 1.03% |
| Highland | 5 | 5.15% | Orkney Islands | 1 | 1.03% |
| Angus | 4 | 4.12% | South Lanarkshire | 1 | 1.03% |
| Argyll & Bute | 4 | 4.12% | West Dunbartonshire | 1 | 1.03% |
| Scottish Borders | 3 | 3.09% | Dumfries & Galloway | 0 | 0.00% |
| Moray | 3 | 3.09% | East Lothian | 0 | 0.00% |
| Falkirk | 3 | 3.09% | Midlothian | 0 | 0.00% |
| East Renfrewshire | 3 | 3.09% | Renfrewshire | 0 | 0.00% |
| Stirling | 3 | 3.09% | Total | 97 | 100.00% |
| South Ayrshire | 2 | 2.06% | | | |

Table 1: Location of respondents

The majority of respondents were located in Edinburgh and Aberdeenshire, which is roughly representative of the distribution of the population of Scotland, although is likely to have been influenced by the additional support of library managers in Aberdeenshire and Edinburgh who encouraged staff to participate. Glasgow may also be under-represented; although no formal figures are available, there are 31 secondary schools in Glasgow which are served by one librarian across every two schools. These figures indicate an approximate 30% response rate in Glasgow. The respondents to the survey represent a broad range of Scottish regions, although there were no participants from Dumfries and Galloway, East Lothian, Midlothian or Renfrewshire.

Roles of respondents

A wide range of role titles were provided, at different levels within organisational hierarchies. The range of levels of roles held by respondents provides a good cross-section of the population of school library workers in Scotland.

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------|----|---|----|
| Librarian | 37 | Learning Resource Centre Manager | 1 |
| Library Resource Centre Co-ordinator | 11 | Learning Resource Coordinator | 1 |
| Network Librarian | 11 | Learning Resource Manager | 1 |
| School Librarian | 11 | Library Assistant | 1 |
| Learning Community Librarian | 7 | Library Supervisor | 1 |
| Learning Resource Centre Co-ordinator | 5 | Principal Teacher Humanities | 1 |
| Library Resource Centre Manager | 4 | School Learning Resources Centre Co-ordinator | 1 |
| Resource Centre Co-Ordinator | 2 | Secondary School Librarian | 1 |
| Creative Learning Assistant | 1 | Senior LRC Assistant | 1 |
| Head Librarian | 1 | Total | 99 |

Table 2: Respondents' role titles

Library opening hours

Questions 4-6 related to the opening hours and staffing of the library. Question 4 asked how many hours a week the library is open, Question 5 asked how many hours a week the library is open and staffed, and Question 6 asked how many hours a week overall the library is staffed - this question was asked in case library staff work for more hours than the library is open to students or teaching staff.

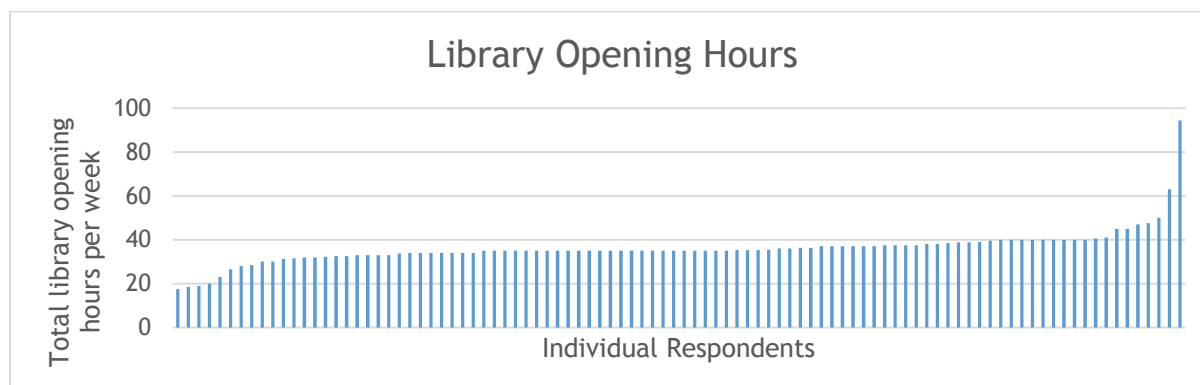


Chart 1: How many hours a week is the school library open?

On average, the respondents' libraries were reported as being open for 35 hours a week, and the majority of libraries were reported as being staffed for the same number of hours as they were reported being open:

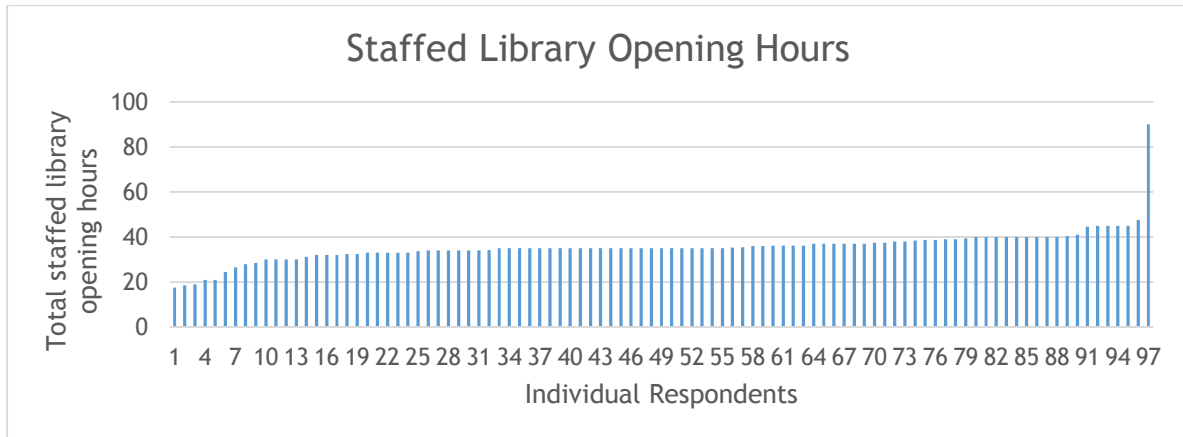


Chart 2: Hours a week library open and staffed

The majority of libraries were reported as being open for between 34 and 36 hours a week, with the lowest number of opening hours being 17.5 hours a week. The highest number of opening hours reported was 94.5 hours a week, with staff working in the library for 45 hours a week. It is likely that this school is a boarding school, which would account for the very high figures.

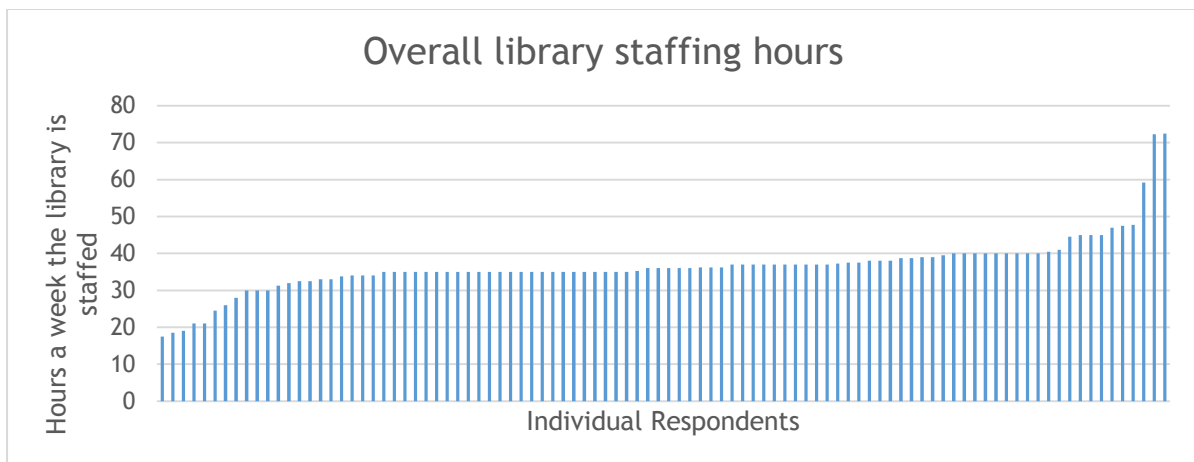


Chart 3: How many hours a week is the library staffed overall?

The table below indicates the various averages for the responses to the opening hours and staffing questions:

| | Responses | Mean | Mode | Median |
|--------------------------------|-----------|-------|------|--------|
| Average library opening hours | 96 | 36.15 | 35 | 35 |
| Average staffed opening hours | 97 | 35.63 | 35 | 35 |
| Overall library staffing hours | 96 | 36.7 | 35 | 36 |

Table 3: Average library opening and staffing hours

This question was asked to identify potential trends in opening hours and/or staffing and levels of resource provision, and also to give an idea of the degree of access library users may have to the various resources.

Library Resources

This section reports the results of questions relating to the provision of resources in school libraries.

Availability of resources

In response to Question 8: “Which of the resources below are available for students in your school?” the majority of participants responded that computers and the internet, books about the political system, social and political issues, and newspapers and magazines are available in the schools. Slightly fewer than half of respondents indicated an awareness that citizenship lessons are provided by schools, and just over a quarter of respondents reported that politics lessons are available for pupils:

| Answer | Response | % |
|---|----------|-----|
| Computers with internet access | 93 | 97% |
| Books about social and political issues | 91 | 95% |
| Books about the political system | 85 | 89% |
| Newspapers and magazines | 67 | 70% |
| Citizenship lessons | 47 | 49% |
| Politics lessons | 32 | 33% |
| Displays about politics | 27 | 28% |
| Other (please specify) | 16 | 17% |

Table 4: Political information resources

Of the “other” resources available, respondents reported resources such as news cuttings files, topical displays (about issues other than what they considered to be ‘politics’), local government information leaflets, author and speaker visits, reading and writing competitions, displays of pupil work, and prison visits as resources about the political system and politics.

Fiction books were also identified as relevant by three respondents. Some respondents reported that their schools subscribe to resources which specifically focus on politics or current awareness, or which contain relevant content, including databases and online sources, subscriptions to The Day news search engine, and subscriptions to Issues/Issues Today. The latter resources were described as providing “easily accessible info for lower years on social/political issues”.

Budget constraints were identified by one respondent as being a limitation of information provision, but one which is overcome through information literacy instruction and online resources:

“Although we don't stock newspapers (due to budget restrictions) students are instructed in accessing good quality news online. We have a small range of magazines that have been donated but students are instructed how to access magazines online.”

Some respondents reported involvement in activities such as mock elections and whole-school political debates, including the libraries serving as polling stations for the Youth Parliament Elections and being involved in mock election processes:

“We hold our authentic schools elections mirroring exactly the process for the general election, Scottish Independence referendum etc. (poll cards, voting slips, same election furniture used in adult elections, full signage, training for pupil election officials) and all taking place in the library (used as a polling station for the day).”

Other respondents indicated that political education is seen as the responsibility of specific departments within schools:

“Citizenship and politics lessons are provided by the Humanities and Citizenship Faculty, not by the library.”

“Modern Studies cover many aspects of the political systems both in Scotland and in the wider world.”

Some respondents indicated that the library has some role in supporting these departments:

“Most politics instruction is from the Modern Studies department supported by the LRC/librarian.”

In response to another question, two respondents reported that they were making a conscious effort to increase the library’s resources around this subject:

“I have been trying to build up the library's stock of political books, both about the parties themselves and the political process and on the issues underlying much of the political debate.”

“We do not have up to date resources in our library for modern studies but are trying to build this up.”

The degree to which respondents felt there were enough of these resources available in their schools varied. The table below indicates the average ranking respondents gave on a sliding scale where 0 represented not enough and 100 represented enough:

| Resource type | Av. Value | Std. Dev. | Responses |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Computers with internet access | 77.80 | 24.09 | 94 |
| Books about social and political issues | 60.19 | 24.94 | 90 |
| Citizenship education | 51.07 | 28.86 | 89 |
| Politics education | 44.12 | 26.81 | 83 |
| Books about politics | 43.40 | 25.87 | 73 |
| Newspapers and magazines | 37.47 | 30.03 | 66 |
| Displays about politics | 34.71 | 32.19 | 58 |

Table 5: Sufficiency of political information provision

The responses to this question indicate that internet access and citizenship education are the political literacy resources most viewed as present at a sufficient level within schools, whereas the level of information present through politics displays, newspapers and magazines, and books about politics are most viewed as being less than sufficient within schools. Some of the suggested reasons given for the lack of information in these formats are discussed later in the report.

The average values of the responses indicates that the respondents tended to think that their libraries provide what could be considered “good” levels of computers with internet access and books about social and political issues. An “average” level (where average would be reported as 50 on the 0-100 scale) of citizenship education was reported, and a below “average” level of politics education, books about politics, newspapers and magazines, and displays about politics were reported.

The standard deviation of the responses indicates that the respondents tended to answer that they thought their libraries provide similarly satisfactory levels of different resources about the political system and politics. This suggests that overall, respondents were satisfied with the computer and internet provision, relevant books, and citizenship education and less satisfied with the availability of other resources.

Library provision of resources for pupils and teachers

The two most significant areas of library activity for supporting citizenship and political participation were the provision of information resources and the presence of the librarian/library assistant as a political individual who is in some way different to a teacher. These themes are discussed in more depth below.

| Type of support provided by library/staff | Examples |
|--|--|
| Provision of resources | Displays, books, lesson support |
| Information literacy instruction | Research techniques |
| Provision of space | Venue for events e.g. public speaking and mock elections ICT space for subjects/lessons relating to citizenship |
| Presence as a knowledgeable individual | Pupils ask for help and advice relating to participation |
| Relationship with teaching staff | Making new staff aware of library resources Supporting research for lessons |
| Presence as a ‘political’ individual | Facilitators of discussion and debate |

Table 6: Kinds of resource provision relating to politics and citizenship

Types of resources provided

The kinds of resources library workers provide for teaching staff working on the political education of pupils includes:

- Displays (e.g. policies in mock elections, 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" current affairs website and "Issues Online"

The majority of respondents reported that they provide information and resources, but did not specify whether this was as a matter of course or in response to being asked specifically. However, one respondent reported that they had been specifically asked "to identify and provide access to appropriate articles and information on both Yes and No referendum campaigns and other relevant issues".

Information literacy instruction

Only a couple of respondents identified activities they engage in which specifically connect political participation and citizenship with information *literacy* activities as opposed to information provision. The activities related to research techniques in a subject-based context. This may represent a lack of awareness of the way information literacy instruction in schools supports political participation and citizenship, or may represent a lack of engagement in information literacy instruction beyond the context of subject lessons, which may be unrelated to participation or citizenship.

Provision of space

Some respondents described the ways in which libraries serve as spaces for people to engage in discussion and activities relating to political participation, including providing space to use ICT resources and the role of libraries as venues for activities such as mock elections and debates about political issues or events.

Presence as a 'political' individual

Some respondents described the ways in which they serve roles within the schools as 'political' individuals who act as facilitators for discussion and debate and contribute to the provision of extra-curricular activities with an explicitly political focus. For example, respondents reported that they help chair debating competitions, organise moral and ethical talk threads for years S4-6, and are involved in groups such as Amnesty and Gender Equality Club. Other respondents reported having regular conversations with students about political topics.

Some specific events and activities organised by librarians and library assistants included bringing pupils to see the SYP present 'Yay Nae Mibbee' at the Edinburgh Book Festival prior to the Scottish Independence Referendum. Two respondents mentioned that they facilitate pupil council meetings.

One respondent reported actively encouraging pupils to participate in local political issues relating to libraries "raise any library related issues with their pupil councils and help pupils find information to contact local councillors about local issues". Another respondent reported using their experience and qualifications in debating and public speaking to support pupils with an interest in those areas.

Reasons for not providing resources or taking part in activities

Of the respondents who answered that they are not involved in supporting pupils' education about political participation, the explanations given fell under the following themes:

- Issues around political neutrality
- Not being asked to be involved/lack of culture of library engagement in school
- Limited resources of school

The most frequently mentioned reason for not supporting political participation was the issue of political neutrality. One respondent talked about wanting to get more involved but feeling that their school is overly cautious:

"I wish I knew how to engage them more on these topics. I feel that the school is concerned with keeping the tone so neutral that they are frightened to engage at all - we are regularly sent Scottish Independent newspapers but I am not supposed to put them out for pupils to view as we do not have the opposing viewpoint also available. It is political correctness to the point of censorship."

Other respondents also discussed the council policies around politics:

"As an external company we must uphold the [local authority redacted] policy of no politics supported in schools."

"As an employee of [local authority redacted] I am not permitted to discuss, debate or indicate my political preference within the school."

"We need to be very careful not to influence pupils in terms of party politics. Staff are not allowed to express political bias in any way."

Some respondents indicated that they have on occasion done something which could be considered supporting education around political participation, but that this is not a structured or formal part of their work and can be considered more of a one-off:

Not directly but support classes/clubs when required

I have forwarded curated web links in the past to do with democracy and the UK political system but have not been involved beyond this.

Limited involvement. Sometimes the Library is used as a venue for speakers.

Teaching and information literacy instruction

Teaching about political participation

Question 10 of the survey asked *“What provision is made in your school for teaching students about how they can participate in politics?”* 48 respondents answered this question. The responses showed much variation in library staff’s awareness of political education and other activities that may take place in schools to teach pupils about political participation.

Several respondents indicated that they either were not aware of it or did not think much happened. One respondent reported:

“Not a great deal outside of regular Modern Studies/PSE lessons. There is a mock election which is held occasionally though it is not a regular curriculum item. I was not at the school during the recent referendum build up but don't recall hearing much activity or provision for younger years pupils. Senior students may have included the topic in their debating club but most pupils did not seem overly concerned/affected.”

Most respondents to this question identified Social subjects and their departments as being responsible for this area of education. More specifically, the following curriculum subjects and areas as providing education about political participation:

- Modern Studies (at National 4, 5 and Higher Levels)
- Citizenship
- PSHE
- Social and Media Studies
- Social Education
- Politics
- Higher Politics for S6 pupils

Some respondents also identified extra-curricular activities as playing a part in the political education of pupils, through mock elections, debating clubs and competitions, political debates, Model UN, Amnesty Group, pupil council, hustings for Parliamentary candidates, and MSP visits. One respondent described how a Home School Partnership Officer talks to the pupils about becoming involved in the Scottish Youth Parliament Elections.

One respondent provided more information about what happens during mock elections:

“Social Subjects hold mock elections where the voting process and party politics is explained to participating pupils.”

They also described what guest speakers talk about:

“Outside speaker came into the school to talk about voting in the referendum.”

Some respondents provided information about specific events and activities that were held around the times of the Independence Referendum and General Election:

“Provision was good at the time of the Scottish referendum - debates, visiting speakers, trips to organised events really sparked an interest in politics around the school with several senior pupils now about to start politics courses at university in September.”

“During the build-up to the recent referendum on Scottish independence a group was taken to the Hydro to participate in the schools' debate there.”

One respondent also reported that a mock Scottish Independence Referendum had been held and that the school had conducted “tutor time activities in the lead up to the election reminding pupils how to register to vote”.

Some limitations to schools’ activities were identified at this point in the survey:

“They will be taught about politics and about voting etc. but we are not allowed to promote any political parties.”

“Any kind of political campaigning is not allowed in [region redacted] schools at all.”

Only one respondent at this point identified the library as an aspect of the provision made in their school for teaching students about how they can participate in politics. This may be reflective of an overall conception that the library is not a core provider of this kind of education.

The majority of respondents reported an awareness of politics education for pupils at some levels, including Higher Politics at S6 level, Modern Studies at National 4 and 5, and Higher Levels. Other respondents reported that political education was provided by Social subjects more generally. PSHE was also identified as a subject that covers politics.

One respondent provided information about an initiative they were involved in chairing, which includes video clips used in schools to encourage discussion and debate around the importance of voting. This project is explored in more depth in the findings from the interview data.

Library workers’ involvement in provision

Question 11 asked “Are you involved in supporting any of these activities?” and respondents were given the opportunity to explain their responses. The majority of respondents reported that they are involved in supporting the activities they identified in Question 10 (discussed in the previous section).

| # | Answer | | Response | % |
|---|--------|--|----------|------|
| 1 | Yes | | 44 | 59% |
| 2 | No | | 28 | 37% |
| 3 | Other | | 3 | 4% |
| | Total | | 75 | 100% |

Table 7: Involvement in teaching about political participation

Of the respondents who answered that they *are* involved in supporting these activities, the further information included details about how they are involved, and what resources and support they provide. The majority of respondents identified information provision and displays as the ways they support the school to teach pupils about how to participate in politics. Some respondents identified library staff involvement and management of clubs and activities as a way they support teaching about political participation. One respondent reported that they are one of the co-ordinators of the Gender Equality Club, and others described involvement in Amnesty Club and debating societies. These are roles which may

mean pupils conceive of library staff as explicitly politically engaged, which could in turn influence how they are viewed as sources of political information. Some respondents identified themselves as people pupils feel they can ask questions about politics.

Supporting Global Citizenship

Global Citizenship is a strand of the Curriculum for Excellence which focuses on helping pupils to “acquire the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to adapt and to thrive” when “living and working in a global society”²⁶. One of the key principles is to enable pupils to “[t]hink creatively and critically and act responsibly in all aspects of life, politically, economically and culturally”, which includes the development of political literacy²⁷.

Question 12 asked “Are you involved in supporting Global Citizenship as part of the Curriculum for Excellence?”

Responses to this question were extremely divided, with half of the respondents reporting that their work does not involve supporting the Global Citizenship element of the Curriculum for Excellence. This exemplifies the lack of consistency in the role library services play within schools across Scotland.

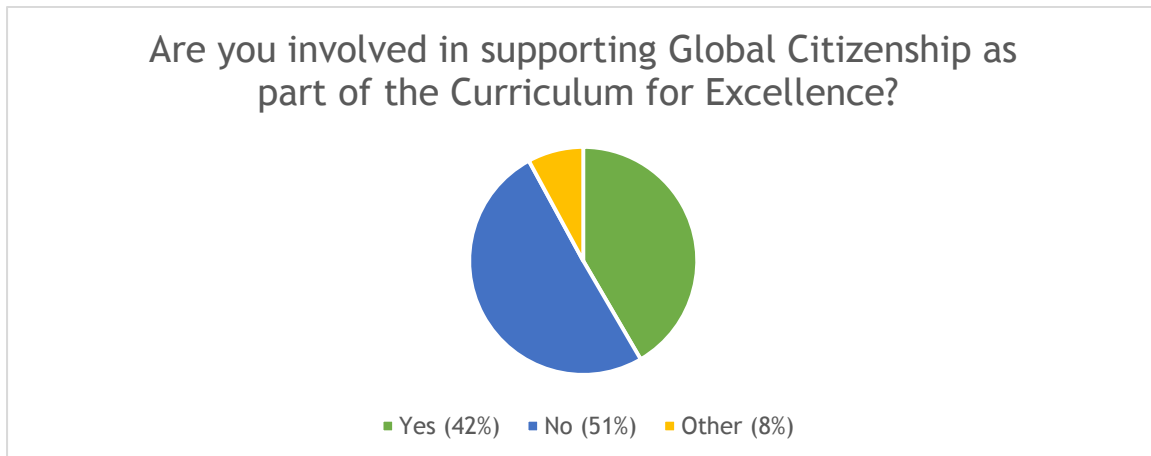


Chart 4: Involvement in supporting Global Citizenship element of Curriculum for Excellence

Some specific examples of Global Citizenship topics libraries have been involved in included:

- Climate change
- Sustainable development
- Unity and Diversity Week
- UN convention on human rights
- Fairtrade
- Refugees
- Equality
- Amnesty Group

²⁶ Education Scotland (2016). Developing global citizens within Curriculum for Excellence.

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningandteaching/learningacrossthecurriculum/themesacrosslearning/globalcitizenship/about/developingglobalcitizens/what.asp>

²⁷ Education Scotland (2016). Key principles of Global Citizenship.

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningandteaching/learningacrossthecurriculum/themesacrosslearning/globalcitizenship/about/developingglobalcitizens/principles.asp>

- Religious festivals
- European Day of Languages
- Martin Luther King Day
- Holocaust Memorial Day

Some examples provided relating to how the library services support Global Citizenship were:

- Providing fiction from a range of cultures
- Providing learning resources: non-fiction, newspapers, online resources
- Freerice project
- Promoting relevant information and resources
- Supporting class research and helping with research skills
- Library displays

The reasons given for not being involved in supporting Global Citizenship included:

- Not following the Curriculum for Excellence or Global Citizenship strand

Several respondents reported that libraries are involved in whole school events, many of which informally relate to Global Citizenship:

“In some aspects the work I do in the LRC is representative of the Global Citizenship ethos but it is not a formalized part of the lesson or support planning process.”

Most involvement in the Global Citizenship element of the Curriculum for Excellence related to Fair Trade initiatives and work relating to Enterprise and international issues. In several cases this related specifically to individual staff members’ involvement in roles beyond the library which may then be brought back into library work. For example, one respondent gave details of how their work fits into Global Citizenship:

“I am the coordinator for the schools global partnership school in South Africa - Ogwini High School. I also help coordinate Fair trade initiatives. My Information Skills package for S1 pupils has a South African theme.”

Some respondents linked the information they provide about social issues to Global Citizenship, within a broad definition of the term which encompasses a wide variety of social and political topics:

“I provide information and resources on social issues, racism, charities, human rights, poverty, issues surrounding illiteracy.”

The role of the library in supporting the Global Citizenship aspects of the Curriculum for Excellence

Question 13 asked if library workers thought the school library had a role to play in supporting Global Citizenship.

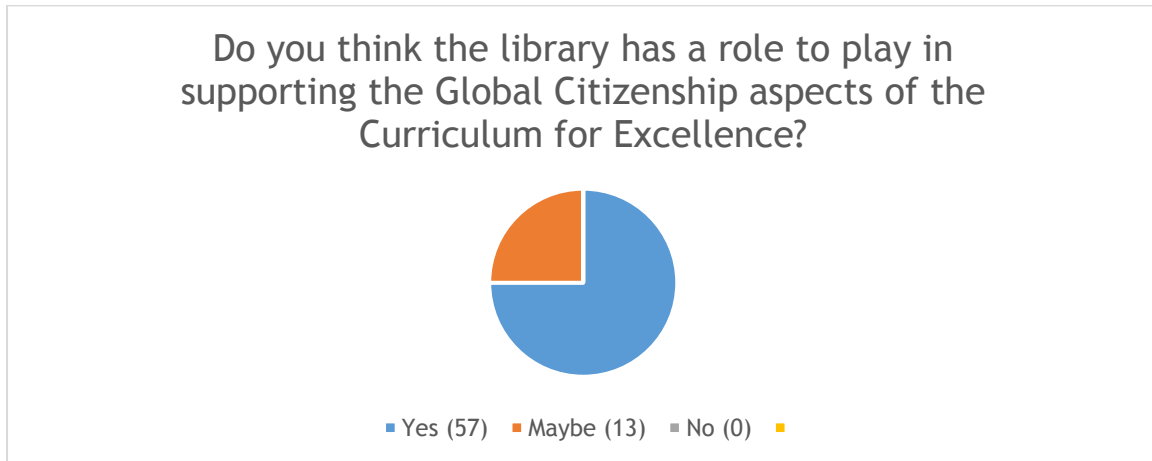


Chart 5: Role for information literacy in Global Citizenship

The majority of respondents said that they did think the library has a role to play in supporting the Global Citizenship strand of the Curriculum for Excellence. Several respondents said that they thought school libraries have a role to play in all aspects of the Curriculum for Excellence. Specific examples of *how* the library can support this element of the CfE included:

- *“Especially in information retrieval and digital literacy skills to be more aware of internet safety when finding out about global community”*
- *“The librarian is ideally placed to see commonalities between sometimes disparate subjects in order to suggest interdisciplinary projects”*
- *“The Library is available for booking by classes from all subjects, including PSE, to carry out research and produce finished work across the strands of CfE. I am also available to provide support ranging from answering enquiries, advising on resource choices or running information literacy inputs.”*
- *“The library and librarian can play an important role in developing pupils as confident learners and individuals which has significance for Global Citizenship.”*

One respondent suggested that this involvement in the curriculum should come with limitations:

“Yes, by providing resources and information. Teaching responsibilities should remain with the teachers.”

Several respondents identified limited time and resources as a barrier to full engagement with the curriculum, saying for example:

- *“The library is not always as involved as it could/should be in these things due to librarian's hours being split between schools. It's hard enough to get time for basic lending and info literacy for the pupils, doesn't leave much time for other activities.”*

- *“Something a bit more formalised in an L & T context would be good but I am very, very busy here anyway with a school body of 1100 pupils so it's finding the time to create such a series of lessons that is the problem!”*

The wide range of responses and examples provided in response to this question and the previous question about whether the library does or should support Global Citizenship indicates the Global Citizenship strand of the Curriculum for Excellence is interpreted differently across schools and by different staff members. This is to be expected to some extent but may also indicate an area in which school library staff may benefit from support: understanding the different areas of the Curriculum for Excellence and the ways in which the school library has a role to play in its delivery.

Information literacy provision

The majority of respondents reported that they do have some involvement in information literacy provision in schools, either within or outwith the library space. It is important to bear in mind that many respondents identified as library assistants, who are less likely to be responsible for information literacy provision than librarians (although this is not always the case):

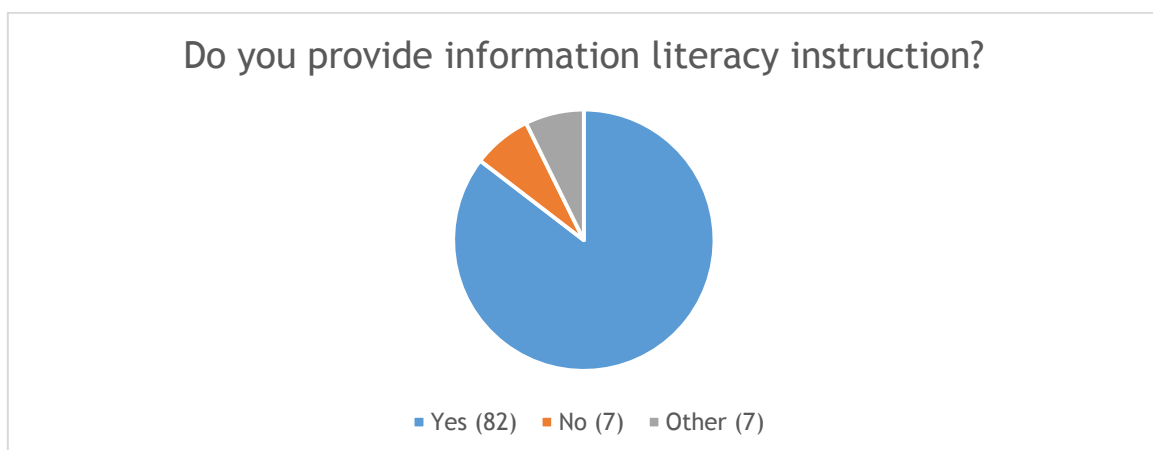


Chart 6: Information literacy instruction

Seven of the 96 respondents to this question provided further information. The comments included information about working with teachers and other groups and links to HE:

- *“I am joint-leader in a creative writing group which produces an in-house magazine. This takes place elsewhere.”*
- *“IL sessions delivered in the library and also embedded in S1&2 literacy classes delivered by class teachers as part of a programme developed by the PT English and Librarian”*
- *“Provide RISK programme (Research and Information Skills) course to all S1 pupils and then a more advanced course to all S3 pupils. / We also provide /accompany S6 student to Aberdeen University library for training as well as providing training on S6 PSE induction day and ad hoc workshops for Advanced Higher students.”*
- *“S1, S2-S4 in Tutor time, S6 in depth induction internal and external resources.”*

Other comments communicated a lack of involvement in IL-related activities:

- *“Only very very little at the moment. States Dec 2014 and have done one website session with a class and 2 mini (8 students on each) book session”*
- *“Occasionally when asked”*

One comment indicated that IL instruction would be happening in the future:

- *“I will be starting to do this in the library in August 2015 (Session 2015/16)”*

Political issues in information literacy

Question 14 asked if respondents’ work in information literacy ever involves talking about politics or political issues with students. This question was asked to gauge the extent to which school library staff engage in the more political aspects of information literacy. 78 respondents reported that they are involved in providing information literacy support (question 7) - of these, 14 respondents reported that this information literacy support has a political element.

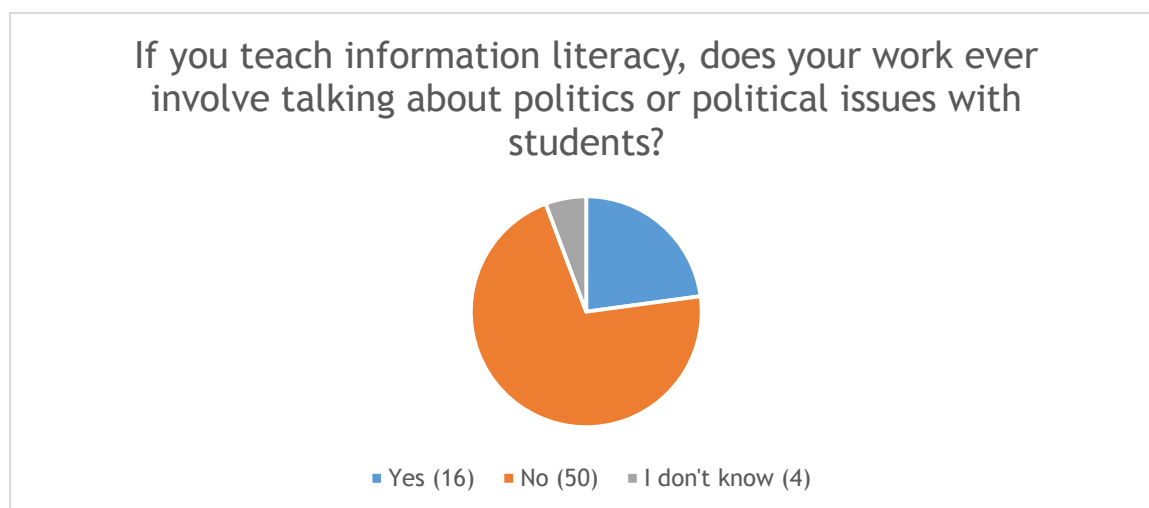


Chart 7: Politics in information literacy

The examples given by respondents of the political elements of information literacy provision included:

- Talking about apartheid in an S1 information literacy course;
- My information literacy lessons deal with China and we look at the different systems in both countries and do a contrast and compare session on a Chinese school;
- I teach an information literacy course and we do talk about political literacy in it
- Using political topics as the focus of research projects and discursive essays and discussing how pupils would access information, what sources they might trust, when it would be appropriate to use which pieces of research;
- Enthusing pupils to pick topics they feel passionately about and trying to include as many up to date topics as possible. For example yesterday I spoke about the Charleston shootings and the political and racial ramifications of the atrocity.
- Using examples of news websites or newspapers to get pupils to think about the difference between fact and opinion and bias. Political items are particularly good to get the discussion going.

Other respondents reported that their engagement with politics or political issues is only touched on tangentially through pointing out biases inherent in political material and the ways of dealing with this through information literacy practices.

Although unrelated to information literacy, one respondent discussed how they engage with political issues through the books read as part of various activities:

“During my work with S3 pupils for The Scottish Children's Book Awards last year, I met with pupils on a weekly basis for discussion of the shortlisted books. Two of the books had political themes. One dealt with refugees arriving in Scotland and another book looked at politics in Palestine. Discussion was wide-ranging and pupils shared their opinions with each other and with me in the discussion groups. I lead book talks for S1 and S2 and sometimes these include looking at and talking social or political issues, if they are related to the themes of the book.”

The reasons given for not engaging in the political dimensions of information literacy centred around several main themes:

- The perceived neutrality of the library;
- The complexity of the issues;
- A lack of time and resources;
- Not feeling confident or knowledgeable enough;
- Not feeling it is appropriate;
- Not feeling it is a priority;
- Not feeling it is relevant.

“In the context of information literacy I don't think it is appropriate to involve politics of any kind.”

Views on whether information literacy should involve talking about politics or political issues with students

Leading on from some of the responses to the previous question, question 15 asked if respondents felt information literacy *should* have a political dimension.

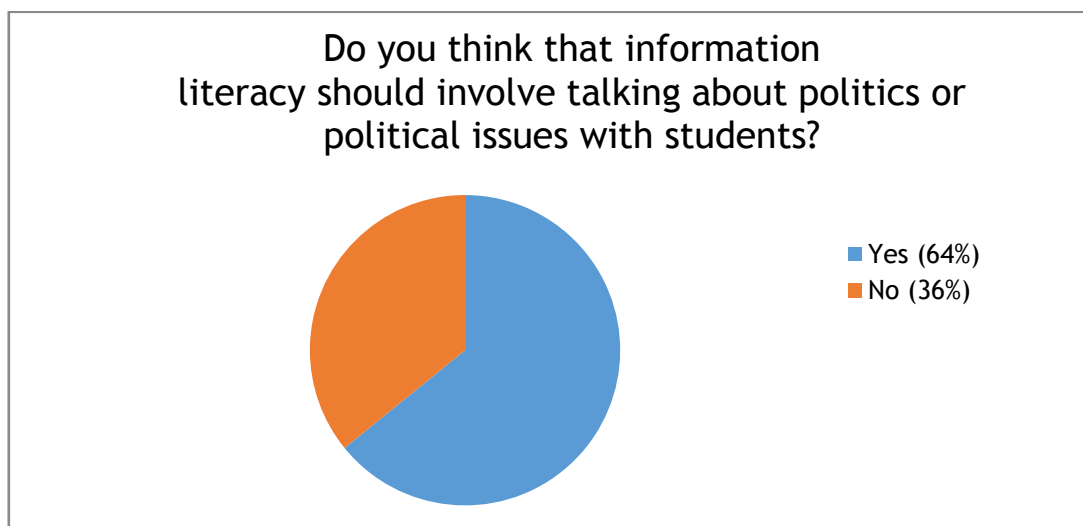


Chart 8: Role for politics in information literacy

The majority of respondents thought that information literacy should involve talking about politics and political issues with students, although the proportions of yes and no responses indicate that this is an area of significant disagreement.

Benefits of and reasons for engaging in politics and political issues through information literacy included:

- *“To help raise pupils' political awareness”*
- *“Yes because political literacy is all about helping people become politically aware and effective. It is about giving them the ability to read issues and events politically.”*
- *“If you are looking at bias and reliability, political material is perfect”*
- *“Political issues can cover so many areas that the pupils research, both curricular and personal”*

From the respondents who said yes, some suggestions about relevant areas of the topic identified included:

- Internet censorship
- Evaluating websites – political bias, viewpoints of authors
- Corporate or political manipulation in web searches
- Bias and different information sources

Some respondents suggested libraries should take a passive role, helping pupils only when they sought information and getting involved in the political dimension of information literacy if and when it arises during sessions and if it is relevant to the context of the lesson. One respondent suggested that Modern Studies teachers are in a better position to engage in work of this nature. Another respondent echoed this sentiment, suggesting “I think it will only work best if modern studies teachers would work with librarians on this”.

Some issues to consider included the need to be aware of the context of the lesson and nature of library engagement, whether or not this was a route pupils wished to take, the need to carefully balance views, the need to avoid aligning with a specific political party, the issue of prioritising what work and areas to focus on, and ensuring that information literacy is not seen solely as “useful for politics”.

Of the 19 participants who said that information literacy should not engage in politics or political issues, 8 gave reasons why. One participant reported that they were “Not convinced there is a need under Info Literacy”. Other participants responded no but then described how information literacy could or should engage in political issues but that they thought information literacy was a broad area, for example:

“It may be useful to cite examples of bias etc. online and in the press using political issues, but I think information literacy in itself needs to be better understood as a general life-skill.”

The complexity and challenges of engaging in this area of work were identified by one respondent:

“I think that it is very difficult to include politics and political issues within information literacy and still maintain a neutral stance. In my opinion the role of information

literacy lessons is to encourage pupils to be more questioning about what information they see, read or hear so that they can come to their own opinions.”

Two respondents suggested that the political dimensions of information literacy are not a priority, and that the transferable nature of information literacy skills means individuals should have the capacity to apply information literacy to political issues themselves without support from libraries:

“I don't think it needs to - information literacy skills are transferable and at least in theory pupils can transfer the skills to politics if they are interested.”

It is not possible to identify whether all of the respondents who said that information literacy should have a political dimension were also those who reported that they include political elements in their own information literacy work, but twice as many respondents (32) said that they thought information literacy should involve talking about politics or political issues, than those who said they engage in such activities (16). This indicates that there is a perceived need or ‘appetite’ for this work, greater than what is currently taking place.

Information needs of pupils

Two questions in the survey addressed the kinds of information pupils sought in the run up to specific political events - the Scottish Independence Referendum and the General Election. There was a notable difference in the amount of interest in the events reported by participants, which is to be expected given the different nature of the two events and the level of involvement pupils were able to have in them.

Support sought from students in the run up to the Scottish Independence Referendum

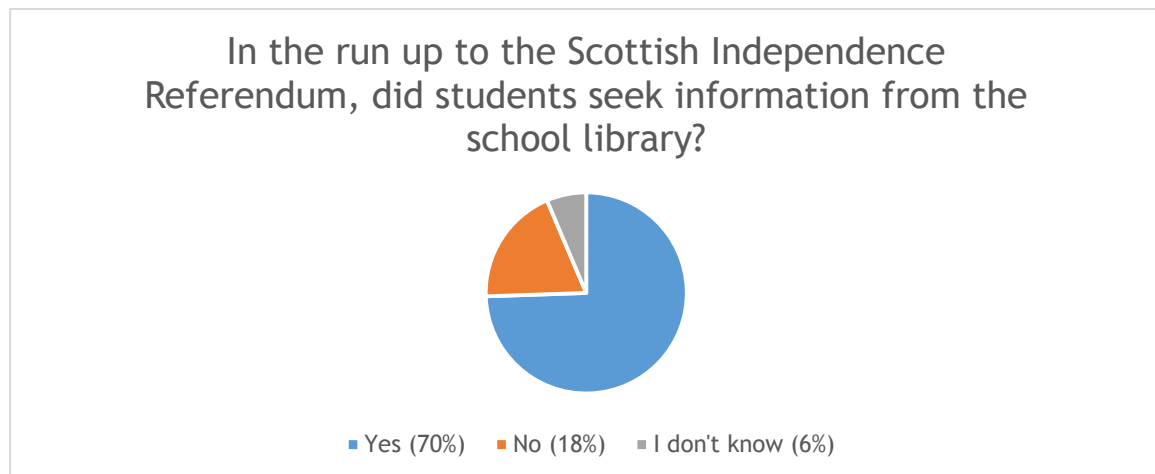


Chart 9: Referendum information

The majority of respondents reported that pupils did seek information from the school library and its staff. The main information sources being sought were:

- Newspapers
- Books about Scottish Independence
- Manifestos
- Relevant websites
- White papers

Several respondents reported that pupils were keen to discuss the Referendum and Scottish Independence with them, including asking library staff for their views. Debates and discussions between pupils, pupils and staff, and staff themselves were reported as being regular occurrences.

A number of pupils sought help with arguments for Yes and No votes, thoughts on the importance of voting, and other discussions with members of staff. Some respondents reported that they were happy and able to engage with discussion of this nature, whereas others said they were not happy or able to and identified guidance and instructions they had received from local authorities as a reason they did not engage in discussion or provide information to pupils. For example:

"[Local authority redacted] instructed staff not to talk to pupils about this topic."

Not all respondents avoided the Referendum as a talking point, however. For example one librarian reported that "The Day" ran several features, which the respondent displayed on the library Plasma screen as a talking point. They reported that "many pupils were anxious to know my personal view but we had been advised to keep a very neutral position". Another respondent reported that BBC News was on the Library TV and pupils and staff discussed what was being broadcast in the run up to referendum. Again, the librarian's personal comments were kept neutral, because the respondent believes "the library should be a neutral place and offer information on both sides of the argument". They reported that this was made clear to pupils, who "respected and agreed with this stand". These are examples of a balance being struck to find an appropriate level of engagement, in which pupils were involved as responsible and mature citizens.

Overall, there was much variation in the reported responses to being asked about their views directly and how discussion of the Referendum was treated within schools. The atmosphere in different schools is reported very differently, ranging from relatively relaxed to quite tense:

"In the run up to the Scottish Independence Referendum the atmosphere in the school among pupils and staff was already quite tense with dogmatic views on each side so I did not promote the library as somewhere to find information on the topic because I felt it would not be received as unbiased."

It is therefore unsurprising that library staff appear to have responded to the overall tone within their schools as well as responding to formal guidance provided by local authorities.

Displays and information packs

Several respondents said they had provided displays, press cutting and packs of material about the Yes and No campaigns. These were used by pupils, but one respondent reported that other members of staff were not happy with the information provision:

"I had both pro and con information available but both got taken and binned by other staff who didn't agree with the points of view."

Some respondents reported that they had difficulties accessing suitable material and described how they tackled this by pooling resources across schools in the area.

"I was disappointed in how little information was directly related to our new young voters."

Where library staff were able to find and display resources, they were often the topic of much discussion:

“My massive ‘Yes? No?’ display prompted much debate over the library counter, where I played devil’s advocate and also often corrected facts e.g. that Polish pupils would be made to leave the country in the event of a ‘Yes’ vote.”

One respondent commented that pupils sought information “despite having a display and resources available”, which may indicate the respondents’ view that this should have been sufficient information for the pupil(s) in question as well as the pupils’ intellectual curiosity on the subject.

Support sought from students in the run up to the General Election

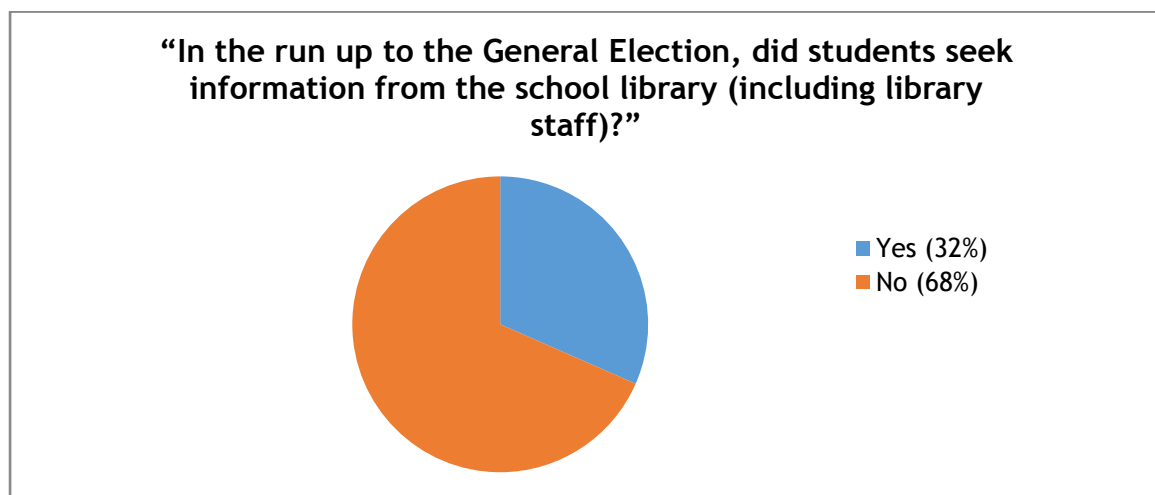


Chart 10: Election information

The majority of respondents reported that students did not seek information about the General Election from the library or its staff. The reasons given for this related to the role and resources of the library and included that the library was “barred from stocking any information regarding the election” and the library “does not have the resources to support much of anything right now”. Other reasons given related to the perception that the students were less interested in the General Election than they had been in the Referendum, and that they did not feel as much of a part of it because they could not vote.

Where students did seek information about the General Election, they sought books and online information about:

“We were barred from stocking any information regarding the election.”

- The main political parties
- Who their constituency representatives were
- History of the electoral process
- Manifestos from the main parties
- Political issues

Respondents also reported the enthusiasm of students seeking to engage in debate and discussion as well as asking questions. Several respondents again emphasised that they were unable to engage in this discussion with students. One respondent reported that they were explicitly prevented from providing information about the election.

Summary

This section has presented the findings from the results of the survey, including the kinds of political information provided by school libraries, the political aspects of information literacy provision, the information needs of pupils, and perspectives around barriers to provision.

Library resources

Respondents reported providing a wide range of library resources related to politics and political participation, but many reported that they do not believe the amount of resources or the budgets they have to provide them are sufficient. Other reasons for not providing certain resources for political education included the view that this is the role of other school departments, such as Modern Studies, and the library does not need to or should not provide relevant materials. A relatively low proportion of respondents produce displays about politics and political events, which may be because of some schools' fears over not appearing politically 'neutral', as well as resourcing issues. This is an indication that school policies (actual or perceived) may act as a barrier to political information provision for young people. A valuable aspect of political information provision identified by respondents was the role library staff play (often alongside teaching staff) in young people's development of political awareness, attitudes, and/or opinions. The value of the role of the library in supporting political literacy should therefore also consider the role of library *staff*, not only the library stock and access to digital materials.

Teaching and information literacy instruction

The majority of participants reported that they do not support formal classes or teaching about politics and participation, and the majority also reported that they do not have a role in supporting Global Citizenship. In order to play a more central role in the school and supporting the Curriculum for Excellence, this may need to be addressed, and this is something library staff appear to be aware of, with the majority reporting that they believe the library does have a role to play in supporting Global Citizenship. The majority of respondents do provide information literacy instruction, and a wide variety of examples were provided. Relatively few respondents' information literacy support involves a political element. Again, school and local authority policy were common reasons for the perceived need to remain 'neutral' and this often led to avoiding political topics altogether. However, some respondents reported a lack of confidence and knowledge about this aspect of information literacy education. These two concerns - what engagement with political elements of information literacy would be deemed appropriate, and how to do it, pose significant challenges for school library staff.

Information needs of pupils

Respondents' identification of what questions pupils asked them in the run up to the Referendum and Election provided an insight into how the two events were received very differently by young people. The Referendum was viewed as far more interesting and unusual, which is not surprising given the uniqueness of the event, particularly because of the extension of the right to vote to 16 and 17 year olds. Some library staff reported being able to help young people meet their information needs by responding to questions and providing access to resources, whereas others were not, due to school policies or general concerns about the need to avoid giving personal views. This inconsistency in how to deal with the political information needs of pupils is something which needs to be addressed.

Interview findings

Six semi-structured interviews were conducted with five school librarians²⁸ and one teacher in Scottish schools. The interviews were coded thematically and the most significant findings are presented below. The findings help to answer the first two research questions:

1. In the run up to the Referendum and the General Election, what provision was made in schools to help pupils understand and participate?
2. How did school libraries support this provision through access to information and information literacy instruction?

There was such a wide variation in the degree to which the school librarians interviewed were able to support the provision of information on political participation that it is difficult to generalize. However, the interviews were revealing in that there are a number of common themes that throw light on the complexity of engaging with political participation. Any guidance produced for school libraries need to take account of these factors. The most significant findings related to pupils' high degree of interest in the Scottish Independence Referendum, the variety of questions asked to librarians by pupils relating to politics, issues with information literacy related to the information available online, issues of neutrality and balance. Several barriers relating to the delivery of political education and information literacy relating to political issues were identified, as well as examples of best practice in supporting political learning and information literacy. A set of recommendations relating to how library workers and schools may seek to approach and improve their provision of information literacy relating to political participation, based on the issues emerging from the findings from the interviews, is presented.

High pupil interest in the Referendum

“You’ll never get the same fever at a General Election because the Referendum was so fundamental”
Librarian 4

School librarians reported that the independence referendum 2014 stimulated a lot of interest among pupils. There was also a degree of the same “buzz” around the General election in 2015 but to a lesser extent. Young people were discussing the referendum among themselves, seeking online and also seeking information from school staff. Young people got actively involved in debates, mock-referendums, and many chose to write discursive or persuasive pieces for their English qualifications on topics relating to the referendum.

Young people’s questions about politics and information

Respondents reported that pupils asked general questions about the Referendum, for example about why the Referendum was happening, how to register to vote and to check their own eligibility to vote. They also wanted to know about what would happen in the event of a Yes vote on Independence. They looked for information about potential changes to higher education, understandable given that any changes could have an impact on their plans for the near future. One respondent reported some young people asked for information about concepts such as socialism, fascism and communism, which they had

²⁸ All interviewees identified as librarians rather than library assistants or other roles - they are therefore referred to as librarians throughout this section of the report.

come across in discussions or online reading, and that it was difficult to find resources on these topics that were pitched at this age group.

All respondents reported that pupils had asked about their personal perspectives especially during the Referendum campaign. Young people asked librarians if they had heard about a particular news item, or how they reacted to an event in the news. This reflects the overall high level of interest at the time, and suggests that young people were seeking

“By shutting those doors you’re saying ‘we’re not doing this, we’re not having these discussions’ and that leaves young people without any guidance towards good places to find information or places to get ideas or even to start the discussion. Because if you get kids going they will come up with amazing ideas.” Librarian 3

conversations and active discussions rather than facts only. Often pupils were curious as to how the adults around them were going to vote. This was often felt not to be out of nosiness – rather it showed a genuine interest and that they felt that the library was a safe place to express that “healthy curiosity”. Young people wanted to hear the arguments people would give to explain their own position. Dealing with these questions was challenging and library staff handled them in different ways.

Some participants said they felt comfortable expressing a personal opinion if specifically asked, whereas others explained they needed or preferred to remain neutral. Some would divert the conversation by putting different questions or arguments to pupils who would often then take the conversation on between themselves. Some respondents reported that they do not believe they are not “allowed” to express an opinion, including in situations where they are directly asked in the context of wider discussions with pupils they know well.

Activities school libraries are engaging in

Some schools ran mock-elections, with different degrees of authenticity, where pupils ran parallel campaigns to the real election campaigns. Some school libraries acted as information hubs, collecting and displaying a balanced range of materials including press cuttings, information about the parliamentary system in the UK, campaign materials, and books (fiction and non-fiction). School libraries have functioned as polling stations for mock-elections, as locations for meetings, and for debating society competitions.

Respondents reported that a significant number of pupils chose to write discursive or persuasive pieces for their English qualifications on topics relating to the referendum, and librarians were able to support pupils with their research on these tasks.

Observations of pupils’ political information literacy

Some librarians noted pupils seeking information online tended to search quickly and not to look beyond the first few results from search engines. Some pupils struggle to select appropriate keywords and many are inputting full questions into search engines such as “how should I vote in the referendum?” leading to results from sites such as www.ask.com being popular. Some young people lack an understanding of how to assess reliability and the meaning of “bias”. However, for pupils who do have an awareness of these ideas, reliability and bias do not seem to be important factors in the selection of online sources of information. While young people seem to understand that newspapers and blogs have their own political leanings, they may lack a sense of scepticism when reading individual articles

and tend to trust cited figures for example, not recognising that statistics can be “spun”. Young people tended not to look for online sources putting both sides of an issue.

Views on the need for political neutrality

All of the interviewees were committed to providing a library service that was neutral, impartial, balanced or non-biased around political subjects and particularly around election times. There is a lot of variation in what this means in practice and significant confusion around what is “allowed”. There is an appetite to engage with political participation work, but the responsibility for this cannot be left to school librarians alone. There is a clear need for clarification to go out nationally for all school staff and management about what can and cannot be done in schools at election times specifically. Several respondents made reference to regulations around schools as “public buildings” and a number mentioned that their school was concerned about attracting negative media coverage.

Respondents were concerned that they should not be in any way “pushing” pupils into voting a particular way. One respondent suggested that education staff in general might tend towards the left-wing end of the political spectrum. Some respondents who were involved in political engagement work around the Independence referendum did experience difficulties. One respondent reported a parent complaining to a school during the independence referendum that staff were allegedly letting “misinformation” go unchallenged. A pupil had quoted some figures from the Yes campaign materials, and this raised objections from the No-voting parent.

“I might have got away with it...I probably could have put something up”
Librarian 4

Providing a neutral, balanced, unbiased service, which provides access to a range of views on different issues, was reported as being extremely challenging for respondents. For example, some librarians strived to stock only “neutral” sources on the Referendum, which it was felt led to very limited provision in the form of one or two leaflets or books. Several librarians turned down requests from pupils to display leaflets for one of the

campaigns. Many considered creating displays with a balance of Yes and No campaign materials, or of authors who had declared for one or other campaign. However, the overall feeling was that doing so was likely to cause difficulties.

How to handle the “Scots Independent” newspaper was reported as being a dilemma for many librarians. One librarian, who identified as pro-Independence, viewed it as too biased to display, but the Scots Independent office did not allow the school to opt-out of receiving it. Another librarian reported keeping it behind the library desk, so it is available only on request. A consequence of this may be that pupils are unaware of it. Some display the newspaper without being completely comfortable doing so, and reported that they would prefer if there was a similar anti-independence publication to display alongside it. In some schools whether the “Scots Independent” goes on display or in the bin depends on which member of staff is there when it arrives in the post.

Challenges of delivering political education and information literacy

Our interviewees mentioned a number of challenges they face in delivering both support for current school work on political topics, and in delivering any information literacy work. These included:

Finding resources that fulfil all of the political information needs of young people

When given the freedom to choose topics for extended research and writing tasks, young people choose a wide variety of often very specific topics. For example: women’s prisons, youth crime, nature vs. nurture, zoos, homelessness, home schooling, LGBT issues, and suffragettes. It seems there will always be a topic that is unique or that comes as a surprise so finding resources for these tasks can be challenging.

“Up to date
and Scottish is
very difficult”
Librarian 4

The “Issues” series is one of the resources that are aimed at exactly this type of task – it compiles articles organized by theme on contemporary issues from real news sources. However, librarians have noted that “Issues” often cites statistics from England only, when young people in Scotland are understandably looking for information that relates to Scotland as well.

Budget and staffing limitations

Respondents reported that library budgets are currently very limited. For example one school in our study allocates less than £1 per pupil to the annual library budget. Some librarians are supplementing library collections with items they personally purchase, such as daily newspapers.

One respondent said that there is sometimes a confusing picture when it comes to online resources. Schools may have access to some subscription services via their local authority, others through the public library system which may not be separate to the local authority. Schools can also subscribe individually. This respondent was concerned that duplication was a potential problem, and wasteful of limited budgets.

Additionally, some school budgetary systems seem to make it impossible to set up subscriptions to print newspaper resources and staffing limitations make it difficult to find cover for outside events and extra-curricular activities such as mock elections and debating societies often depend on staff volunteering their own time.

Diverse needs of young people

“I don’t think
informing our kids
can ever be bad”
Librarian 5

Librarians devising and delivering information literacy instruction are trying to range a wide range of learning needs. It is difficult (if not impossible) to devise one information literacy scheme that is suitable for all ability levels, different literacy levels, pupils who are learning English as an additional language. Several respondents also commented on pupils coming to school hungry which is of course very concerning and confirms that when young people’s basic needs are not met, higher level needs such as learning, inevitably suffer.

Risk aversion within schools

In some schools senior management gave explicit guidance that was very restrictive around elections, actually blocking school libraries from displaying information beyond instructions on how to register to vote. Some Librarians were instructed by school management not to discuss upcoming elections or that they could not express a personal view if directly asked. More commonly word-of-mouth among staff helped to spread an atmosphere of fearful silence. This approach was jokingly referred to by one respondent as “Don’t Mention the

Referendum!” but it was also clearly the source of frustration for many. One respondent likened this approach to over-zealous internet filters – these do not mean that pupils stop looking for political information; instead they drive it underground and mean that an opportunity to engage in information literacy and internet safety work is missed.

“It’s like with the internet. We don’t teach kids how to use it different ways, we just block it, and if you block it, it just goes underground and they’ll do it on their phones or they’ll be doing it secretly. It’s not that they’re not doing it – but we just have no way of helping them.” Librarian 3

Politics as a sensitive topic

While there was a desire to treat politics like any other subject area (“just like Vikings or plants”) a number of responses highlighted ways that politics is very much a “live” issue that schools need to treat sensitively. Many respondents talked about politics as being quite a “personal” subject, that not everyone is comfortable discussing even with friends. However, schools and libraries already deal with a number of sensitive topics. It is not possible to keep “real life” and “school life” completely separate.

Current events interact with school life in unpredictable ways. One librarian noted that in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo attacks in France, some pupils were quite vocal in expressing far-right, anti-immigration, anti-Muslim sentiments. Pupils then asked if the librarian would ever consider displaying the Charlie Hebdo magazine in the school library. The librarian in this instance had a discussion with the pupils about issues involved, which satisfied the interest those pupils had at that time. The incident of a parent complaining to a school during the independence referendum is another example of how politics has the potential to be a divisive and personal part of life, which, as evidenced from the comments made in several interviews, is something school librarians are conscious of.

All respondents were keen to see young people be more interested in politics. One respondent said that if pupils could see the effect politics has on their own lives, local issues would be pushed further up the political agenda in general, such as how poverty had led to the need for foodbanks. Another suggested in a diverse catchment area with many EAL pupils, pupils might feel more settled and rooted if they understood more about local issues, and if they could have opportunities to meet and quiz their own MPs and MSPs. Another also saw benefits in widening the horizons of young people beyond just their local area.

“You want these young people to be engaged but we need to discuss it. We all saw how people were engaged during the referendum and there’s no reason why it can’t be like that all the time but it has to be discussed. It has to be something people are willing to discuss, and there’s a debate and you maybe don’t agree with people and that’s fine, you don’t have to agree with everyone. But if we don’t there’s a huge detriment to society and to the young people themselves.” Librarian 3

Supporting school library staff

We asked respondents what kind of information would be useful to them if they were to look at guidance brought out by this project. Librarians were looking for the following:

- Advice about what they can and cannot do in terms of staying within policy boundaries;
- Support with advocating for engaging in this kind of work;
- Evidence demonstrating effectiveness of political participation work in other schools;
- Anything that highlights to teachers that school librarians contribute to the Curriculum for Excellence and citizenship agenda;
- Case studies and examples about what other school librarians are doing;
- Signposting sources of information, for example print and online resources that explain terms such as “right-wing” and “left-wing,” media and statistical literacy resources.

Summary

This section has reported the findings from the interviews with librarians (and a teacher), identifying their attitudes towards political information provision and related information literacy activities, the main challenges faced by school library services when seeking to engage in this work, and the professional and ethical issues that are considered when seeking to support political literacy. These findings, together with the findings from the survey, have been used to make several recommendations relating to research and practice.

These recommendations are presented after two supplementary sources of information: a case study, which is an illustration of an activity described in one of the interviews. It is an example of best practice in which the school library is involved to support political literacy and political participation; and secondary data relating to the information needs of young people relating to politics and political participation, provided by YoungScot. These sources of information help to place the role of information literacy into context, and give examples of how school libraries can work with external agencies to support political participation.

Case Study: Aberdeenshire Schools Elections

Pupils in secondary schools in Aberdeenshire take part in authentic Schools Elections. The Elections Team at Aberdeenshire Council, led by Allan Bell, started this initiative as part of their political participation remit. The Election Team initiated the activity in aiming to address their statutory duty to promote electoral participation.

The team found that young people were interested in voting but nervous, unsure and lacked confidence about voting for the first time. Pupils did not know what was required of them during the voting process, and Mr. Bell reports that “an easy by-product of [the] projects has been to demystify the actual voting process” for young people.

Teachers and library staff are heavily involved in assisting the candidates/parties/campaign groups to source information aimed at assisting campaigning. School libraries play a role in the Aberdeenshire Authentic Schools Election project by acting as information hubs, collecting and displaying a balanced range of materials including press cuttings, information about the parliamentary system in the UK, campaign materials, and books (fiction and non-fiction). They also function as polling stations and as locations for meetings.

Activities

Aberdeenshire Council's Electoral Participation Group has held a series of election events: a Schools General Election in 2010, a Schools Scottish Parliament Election an AV Referendum in 2011, and an Aberdeenshire Schools Independence Referendum in 2013. The purpose of these events is to encourage electoral participation, to engage young people as fully as possible in the democratic process and to acquaint them with formal voting and counting processes.

Aberdeenshire Schools Elections are run on authentic lines, featuring the use of real polling booths and ballot boxes, a secure voting process, including ballot papers specifically printed for the project, and a single count event where results are formally declared.

Some Aberdeenshire schools also run community council elections where the winning candidates are co-opted on to their local community councils. The elections are authentic in every detail. Pupils who want to run as candidates have to gather signatures and fill in the same forms as candidates in real elections. Staff and pupils undergo training so that they can take part in the count on Election Day. An electoral roll is generated from the school records and pupils are issued with polling cards. The Elections Team bring the same ballot boxes and equipment as to any real election. The schools elections are a useful training exercise for the Elections Team staff.

Mr. Bell reports that one of the strengths of running the Schools UK General Election and Schools Scottish Parliament Election is that the schemes are able to produce results with local (school) resonance, which enhanced the level of interest among pupils in the election projects. Pupils could directly relate to a friend who was representing a political party and were able to recognise the candidates as contesting the constituency of their own school.

The community council project is viewed as a key avenue for interesting young people in grass roots local democracy and reinvigorating existing community council structures with a necessary youthful input.

Practicalities

Mr. Bell reported on some of the practicalities of the scheme, which are likely to be of use to schools seeking to engage in similar work.

Secondary school pupils in schools in Aberdeenshire take part in authentic schools elections. The Elections Team at Aberdeenshire Council, led by Allan Bell, started this initiative to address the statutory duty to promote electoral participation. They found that young people were interested in voting but were unsure about voting for the first time due to not knowing what was required. The Schools Elections project has helped to demystify the voting process for young people. This is now co-ordinated via the Electoral Participation Group, which also involves a number of teaching colleagues, communications staff, the Electoral Registration Officer and others.

Schools elections have run to mirror Scottish and UK elections as well as the Scottish Independence Referendum. Some Aberdeenshire schools also run community council elections where the winning candidates are co-opted on to their local community councils. This engages young people in grass roots local democracy and reinvigorates existing community council structures with a necessary youthful input. Although the schools candidates are co-opted to the community council, they often have a mandate that outstrips that of adult members of the same community council. Pupils who want to run as candidates have to gather signatures and fill in the same forms as candidates in real elections. Staff and pupils undergo training so that they can take part in the count on Election Day. An electoral roll is generated from the school records and pupils are issued with polling cards. The Elections Team bring the same ballot boxes and equipment as to any real election.

In order to reduce the potential for political pressure on individual schools or pupils, those organising the elections generally approach political parties on their behalf to seek to acquire campaigning materials (leaflets, stickers, badges etc.) for use in schools and also ask parties to identify a principal contact who is often filmed. This “party political broadcast” is used to assist the parties formed in the schools themselves. Pupils can set up social media sites for their campaigns. Pupils can represent all political parties which currently have members in Scotland either in the Westminster or Holyrood parliaments. Because both sets of elections require the same Elections Team staff and equipment, schools elections are necessarily run outside of normal elections time. Teachers who facilitate running schools elections do this in their own time in addition to teaching commitments. Teachers are also represented on the Political Participation Group committee which meets regularly. Due to budgetary limitations in 2016 schools elections will run in 8 out of 17 schools.

School libraries play a role in the Aberdeenshire Authentic Schools Election project by acting as information hubs, collecting and displaying a balanced range of materials including press cuttings, information about the parliamentary system in the UK, campaign materials, and books (fiction and non-fiction). Some school libraries also function as polling stations and as locations for meetings. The teachers involved in each school are heavily involved in assisting the candidates/parties/campaign groups to source information aimed at assisting campaigning.

With regard to which political parties are represented in the campaigns, a decision was taken that pupils should represent the political parties which currently have members in Scotland either in the Westminster or Holyrood parliaments. A result of this decision was

that far right parties are not represented, which means difficult judgements about what constitutes a far right party do not need to be made.

Recommendations and limitations

This case study provides an example of the work taking place through councils and partnership working between elections staff, school library staff and teachers. We recommend that local authorities across Scotland look to replicate this project or identify what other similar activities are taking place. However, running authentic schools elections requires months of planning and preparation and it may not be feasible for every Scottish authority to do this to the same extent or in the same way as in Aberdeenshire. One initial driver for Aberdeenshire's series of projects was the availability of additional electoral participation funding around 2010/11. This money was quickly used, but reinstating ring-fenced funding for youth outreach would give more scope for projects to be run more regularly and on a reasonable scale, enabling as many pupils as possible to take part.

Aberdeenshire Schools Election 2016

Another Aberdeenshire Schools Election will be held in 2016²⁹, mirroring the forthcoming Scottish Parliamentary Elections. The event will take place in 16 Aberdeenshire secondary schools, each of which will stage its own contest as part of a single constituency, with up to five pupils at each school standing as candidates for one of the five political parties in Scotland which are represented at either the Holyrood or Westminster Parliaments, namely the Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats, Scottish National Party and the Green Party.

Voting will take place on Thursday, 10 March, with the count being held in Stonehaven the following day. The project replicates the voting system which is used to elect Members of the Scottish Parliament, affording pupils a vote for a candidate in their own school constituency as well as another on a regional list (the Additional Member system). Votes in the latter will be aggregated across all the participating schools to allocate a further seven regional seats. Teachers will be working with pupils in the run-up to their election, discussing the nature of the five parties, as well as their policies and manifestos.

²⁹ Aberdeenshire Council (2016). Schools Election 2016. <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/elections/schools-election-2016/>

The Political Information Needs of Young People: Data from YoungScot

Young Scot is the national youth information & citizenship charity for Scotland. Young Scot provides information, opportunities, discounts, rewards & events for young people aged 11-26 via the Young Scot Card and online platform³⁰. During 2014, Young Scot provided a wide range of information for young people in relation to the Scottish Independence Referendum. This included information on having your say, registering to vote and political literacy. Young Scot worked in partnership with a consortium of youth & third sector organisations including Scottish Youth Parliament and YouthLink Scotland, along with The Electoral Commission, to ensure consistency of message around informing young people of their right to vote. This was also in light of the extension of the franchise to 16 & 17 year olds for the first time.

Over the course of 2014, and in the run up to the Scottish Independence Referendum in September 2014, Young Scot shared a range of content items across multiple digital information & social media platforms. The YoungScot website achieved 294,874 total page views from 1st August to 22nd September, with referendum related content views representing 6% of all page views across the platform.

YoungScot have been able to provide information about the top keyword searches leading to their website during the Referendum period. The keywords listed below and the fact that the people searching for information followed links to YoungScot indicate some of the political information needs of young people and those supporting their political literacy.

During the Referendum period (August - September 2014) the top keywords searched for (relative to politics topical content) were:

- *Independent Scotland*
- *Independence referendum*
- *Scottish independence information*
- *How register to vote*
- *Scottish referendum for kids*
- *Scottish referendum for children*
- *Scottish referendum for dummies*
- *Voting for Scottish referendum*
- *Questions for young people about the referendum*
- *Scotland referendum explained*

'Referendum' was the 9th most searched for term (and top topical information term – excluding discounts) across the Young Scot portal during September 2014.

Additionally, YoungScot were able to provide information about the key pieces of content viewed on their site in August and September 2014. The three most frequently visited pages on the website relating to Referendum/Political content were:

³⁰ www.young.scot

- A page about the Scottish Independence Referendum with information about how to become informed and participate in the Referendum: <http://old.youngscot.org/info/1158-the-scottish-independence-referendum> (this page was also the highest viewed Referendum/Political content of 2014 on the old YoungScot portal)
- The main YoungScot landing page with links to content about voting: <http://old.youngscot.org/info/161-voting>
- A page about how to register to vote: <http://old.youngscot.org/info/2737-how-do-i-register-to-vote>

The data provided by YoungScot indicates that young people's information needs around political events (specifically around the Independence Referendum) are broad in range and include practical information as well as information to help them form opinions and make decisions. This is along the same lines as the information needs identified by library staff in the survey and interview responses for this study, which indicates that school library staff have a good level of awareness of the information needs of their pupils.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from study, several recommendations relating to sharing best practice and overcoming significant barriers are suggested:

Role of libraries in engaging young people in politics

Current political events can stimulate a high level of interest amongst young people, affording an opportunity for school libraries to get involved in political engagement work. This could involve topics such as the electoral system and current affairs. Newspapers and campaign materials provide a potential wealth of examples for information literacy teaching.

The observations about how young people sought information online during the referendum reinforce that there is a skills gap here that could be addressed with more information literacy instruction.

Political literacy is an area of learning which features in several aspects of the Curriculum for Excellence, including Global Citizenship. Understanding the different areas of the Curriculum for Excellence, the inclusion of political literacy, and the ways in which the school library has a role to play in supporting various aspects of the curriculum would be of benefit to library staff, teaching staff and pupils as well as helping to justify the value of school library services to the education system.

It is evident from this study that young people are interested in political events and issues, and view library staff as appropriate people to ask when they have an information need. It would therefore be beneficial for library workers to anticipate that they are likely to be asked for their opinions in political discussions and to consider how they are going to manage these situations. As with any member of school staff, library workers do not need share their personal views at all if they are not comfortable doing so, but it is important for staff to know what is appropriate in a particular context as well as to be aware of the school's policies regarding this (and potentially to challenge them where necessary). It is promising that young people are seeking authentic conversations about political events with people whose input they value, and it is an opportunity for library staff to support young people's development of political and information literacy. Library workers should apply the same skills to these questions as they do to any other reference enquiry. Library staff could highlight print and online resources that might be useful, as well as raise questions such as bias and stimulate debate and awareness of information literacy.

Provision of political information by school libraries

It is important to acknowledge that to be able to successfully engage in work to support political literacy, schools must provide an appropriate level of school library resources, including staffing. Schools should have qualified, full-time librarians with managerial status within schools³¹. As this report has indicated, library staff currently face several barriers relating to library resources and their own limited positions within schools to make strategic decisions about information provision and information literacy.

³¹ Williams, D., Wavell, C., Morrison, K. (2013). Impact of School Libraries on Learning: Critical review of published evidence to inform the Scottish education community. http://scottishlibraries.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/SLIC_RGU_Impact_of_School_Libraries_2013.pdf

Many schools in Scotland do not have the required level of library resources and staff to meaningfully engage in information literacy support for the purposes of supporting educational attainment or citizenship, and within the current context of cuts to school libraries it is likely that many more schools will no longer have an appropriate level of staffing within school libraries to engage in work to provide information and support to pupils relating to political participation. This has implications for schools relating to the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, for example under Article 3 (Best interests), Article 5 (Right to guidance from adults), Article 12 (Respect for the views of the child), and Article 13 (Right to information).

There is an apparent demand for print and online resources on political topics that are pitched at a younger (i.e. teenage) audience and that are written for a general audience, not just those studying politics as an academic subject.

It is not the intention of this report to make a declaration on the appropriateness of displaying specific resources. Librarians are best placed to make the decision on individual resources in the context of providing a balanced range of materials. However, within a balanced library collection, resources need to be findable and not hidden away as pupils need to know the range of resources that exist.

Access to online and print newspapers could be improved. Ideally each school would have access to a range of online and print newspapers. A scheme that was administered centrally would overcome some of the problems with setting up subscriptions. Consortium agreements may offer economies of scale. Providing free or low cost access would be of mutual benefit as it would promote newspaper-reading among the next generation.

More resources should be developed that are aimed at the younger (i.e. teenage) reader and for a general audience rather than those studying politics as an academic subject. The "Issues" format (print and online) works well, but there is a need for resources that are both contemporary and Scottish. Resources also need to be available at different levels of reading difficulty

Online subscription resources need to be easily accessible and well-publicised so that best-use is made of them. It may be possible to build resources in to existing platforms such as GLOW to simplify login procedures.

Specific recommendations regarding the provision of political information are made in the collection management guidelines within the school library standards provided by the School Library Association³². Recommendations include that "The school library provides access to a range of newspapers that reflect political balance, either in hard copy or online".

Policies on political information and education

There is a need for clarification to go out to all schools as to what can and cannot be done around election time. Clarification is needed on what schools can and cannot do, both in general and specifically during election times. This information needs to be disseminated widely so that all school staff can have confidence in planning political engagement work. Guidance should make it clear that school librarians can provide resources that put forward

³² School Library Association (2015). SLA Standards for Secondary School Libraries. <http://www.sla.org.uk/why-schools-need-libraries.php>

different political views. A neutral and unbiased library service is one that provides a balanced range of materials.

One of the core professional values of librarianship is resistance to censorship. However, school librarians need to balance freedom of expression with their duty to keep all pupils safe. Young people need the opportunity to try out different ideas, and they will naturally form and reform their views over time. When holding mock-elections schools should anticipate having to make difficult decisions about including or excluding far-right parties.

Library workers supporting political participation in schools will need to make context-specific decisions sensitively about resources to be stocked and displayed. Professionally qualified school librarians are trained in how to make such decisions and their expertise should be an asset in any school, and it would therefore be beneficial for school librarians to have an influential voice in policy and curriculum development within schools.

The range of responses from survey and interview participants relating to what they may and may not do in terms of information provision and engagement with political events, sometimes within the same local authority, indicates a potential need for improved guidance for schools and staff. This is in line with recommendations from the Electoral Commission, who recommended that local authorities should provide guidance to all their staff relating to conduct in the run up to the Referendum³³. They stated that their key principles of this guidance should be:

- Council staff must by law act in a politically neutral way at all times.
- There is particular sensitivity around this political neutrality in the run-up to an election or referendum.
- Particular care needs to be taken to ensure that any events, publicity or other communications are politically neutral during a pre-election or pre-referendum period.
- Council facilities and resources must not be used, or appear to be used, in support of a political party, an election candidate or a particular campaign in a referendum.
- Unless otherwise stated, it should be assumed that normal council business will continue.

The findings from this study indicate that there may be a lack of clarity with regards to how these principles may manifest in schools and library services. Standardised guidance may be a way to provide clarity.

Additionally, the findings from this study indicate a variety of levels of involvement of school libraries in supporting various aspects of the Curriculum for Excellence, including Global Citizenship and political literacy. Guidance about how school libraries can effectively support political literacy would be of benefit to schools. Education Scotland³⁴ ask the following questions of schools:

³³ Electoral Commission (2013). Political literacy and the referendum on independence for Scotland. http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/157328/Scottish-referendum-education-briefing-June-2013.pdf

³⁴ Education Scotland (2013). CfE Briefing 14: Curriculum for Excellence: Political Literacy. http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/CfEBriefing14_tcm4-813894.pdf

- Does everyone have a clear understanding of the breadth of political literacy in CfE and how it relates to different areas of the curriculum as well as, in particular, to the social subjects?
- Does everyone involved apply local guidelines which are intended to ensure balance and impartiality in learning experiences?
- Does everyone involved have access to the wide range of evidence and perspectives available to them, for example online, and do they explore all of these?
- Do learners and their parents or carers understand how practitioners deliver political literacy and how they ensure impartiality?

These questions may be a useful starting point for schools to consider how they can effectively involve libraries and library staff in supporting political literacy through the Curriculum for Excellence.

Partnership working

Schools should consider planning political engagement work outside of elections time. This could enable more working with council elections team as seen in the Aberdeenshire Authentic Schools Elections project. It might also reduce the likelihood of discussions becoming heated or upsetting and may ease management concerns around requirements on schools as “public buildings”.

The case study of Schools Elections in Aberdeenshire provides an example of the work taking place through councils and partnership working between elections staff, school library staff and teachers. We recommend that local authorities across Scotland look to replicate this project or identify what other similar activities are taking place. To assist with this, further research could explore the impact of the Schools Elections project and identify potential for further funding and dissemination of best practice.

With regard to the Authentic Schools elections, a number of recommendations are made:

- Local authorities across Scotland could look to learn from this project and, where possible, implement similar projects. Additional funding could be specifically aimed at promoting electoral participation; such projects require significant resources, including in terms of the amount of time election professionals and school staff need to commit to running schools elections;
- To assist with this, further research needs to look at this project in particular. This could (a) measure impact to assist with any applications for additional funding (b) disseminate information about project implementation;
- That these projects bring together the professional expertise of elections staff, teachers and school librarians.

The examples of activities being run in some schools demonstrate that it is possible for school librarians to engage in political participation work and highlights an issue with policy consistency across schools in Scotland relating to what kinds of activities are and are not appropriate. However, politics and school life are not and cannot be completely separate. Doing more political engagement work outside of elections times would hopefully also lead to more pupils being interested in those ‘real’ elections. It is our view that if schools engage more with political participation work in general, teachers, librarians and others will have

more confidence dealing with those occasions where current events become “live” issues in school.

Support for school librarians

Survey and interview participants identified several areas where support and guidance may help school libraries to improve their information provision and information literacy:

- Advice about what they can and cannot do to stay within policy boundaries;
- Support with advocating for engaging in this kind of work;
- Evidence demonstrating effectiveness of political participation work in other schools;
- Anything that highlights to teachers that school librarians contribute to the Curriculum for Excellence and citizenship agenda;
- Examples of best practice about what other school librarians are doing that could be replicated;
- Signposting sources of information, e.g. print and online resources explaining political terminology, media and statistical literacy resources.

CILIP/CILIPS and the School Library Association are well placed to support school library workers with these areas.

Further research into the contribution of school libraries

This study has only scratched the surface of the work school libraries do to encourage young people to become engaged citizens. A larger scale study into school libraries across the UK would yield more representative results and provide a broader picture of the work taking place and the barriers being encountered.

Although it is difficult in the field of education to conduct comparative studies using methods such as randomised controlled trials to identify the most effective interventions, a potentially informative area for further investigation may be to seek to identify which activities taking place

“Can you show statistically the difference in the attainment levels and so on between schools that have libraries and librarians and those that do not?”

McMahon in Scottish Parliament 2015

through school libraries are the most effective in supporting the development of political knowledge and ability to locate, understand, critique and effectively use political information. This could form the basis of an evidence-based set of recommendations for supporting informed citizenship in schools and elsewhere. This may contribute to the demands being made by political figures for ‘proof’ that school libraries can and/or do have an impact on pupil attainment and development. Further research would ideally build on the large international body of quantitative (and qualitative) evidence of the positive impact of school libraries on attainment, literacy and learning, with the inclusion of all areas of the Curriculum for Excellence, including Global Citizenship. There has not yet been a quantitative assessment of the impact of Scottish school libraries³⁵ and research should be conducted to address this.

³⁵ Williams. D. (2015) Letter in response to Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee 24th November 2015 PE01581: Save Scotland's School Libraries.

http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_PublicPetitionsCommittee/General%20Documents/20151203_PE1581_A_Prof_Dorothy_Williams.pdf

Conclusions

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?

These aims were addressed through a national survey for school library workers, follow up interviews and data provided by Young Scot. We were able to address the aims with the identification of key areas, presented below:

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 |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays (e.g. policies in mock elections, 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" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 |

Table 8: Summary of information provision and information literacy for political literacy

School libraries supported pupils' political knowledge and participation in a broad range of ways, although there was a variation in provision across the locations of the library workers involved in the study. A more consistent approach to school library provision is recommended. This may be addressed through the identification of the barriers to

information provision and information literacy support relating to political events and processes, which is discussed in the following section.

Voting, elections and mock elections were used by some schools, sometimes with the support of the school library service. The use of these activities is recommended by Education Scotland as an effective way to support the development of political literacy (Education Scotland 2013).

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

The library staff who participated in this study 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 |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The perceived policy of neutrality of the library • Council policies around politics • Lack of clear guidance about what information provision and support is appropriate |

Table 9: Barriers to providing political information and information literacy

However, these barriers were not uniformly reported by all respondents. Some libraries *have* been able to lead or take part in a number of activities which explicitly promote the development of political knowledge and participation, with the support of their local authorities and other bodies. This suggests that this kind of activity is within the accepted remit of school libraries, and that where it is presently believed to not be, there is the potential for discussion around the issues. It may be appropriate for CILIPS and other bodies relating to school libraries to advocate for school libraries' involvement in the elements of education that support pupils' development in relation to citizenship.

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

The participants in this study reported a wide range of information needs of young people in relation to political participation. Questions asked of library staff included why political events were happening, how they could participate, what the outcomes of the events may be, and how the outcomes may affect their own lives. Some young people seek specific information about political parties and ideologies, and resources pitched at an appropriate level for secondary school aged children can be difficult to locate.

An important finding from the study is that young people do not seek only political facts, but are also keen to work out their own political views based on their understanding of the views of people around them, including library staff. Discussing political issues and events is

an important aspect of political socialisation³⁶, and studies have found that young people who had discussed the referendum in school tended to have greater levels of political confidence and understanding³⁷. It may therefore be valuable for library staff to consider engaging in discussion with young people on this topic. However, this is a complex and often personal area which may require professional guidance and reflection.

As discussed above, the research identified a number of examples of the work being done in school libraries to support political participation. These activities developed through the librarians' identification of the needs of the pupils in their schools, but without specific strategic planning and the identification of young people's needs it is not always possible to anticipate what support is needed. This research question aimed to identify the needs of Scottish young people in relation to political participation, specifically around the Scottish Independence Referendum. The insight provided by this study aims to contribute to schools' and librarians' understandings of young people's information needs so that their information provision and information literacy support can be developed to better meet the needs of their own pupils.

The case study and data provided by YoungScot identified that the information needs of the people reaching their website were very similar to the information needs of young people identified by the school library staff who responded to the survey. This suggests that library staff are aware of what kinds of information and support their pupils need and would benefit from, and is a positive sign that school libraries would be well placed to help the development of young people's political literacy. However, given the range of reasons cited for not being able to engage in supporting political literacy by school library staff across Scotland, it is apparent that work needs to be done to provide libraries with the capacity and freedom to engage in information provision and information literacy support relating to political issues.

Contributions of the study

It is hoped that this study will make a contribution to CILIPS' school library advocacy strategy and offers several recommendations for practice, policy and useful directions of further research. Although the study does not provide quantitative or in-depth evidence of the outcomes of school libraries in supporting citizenship and political participation, it does identify several interventions and activities taking place in school libraries and the barriers that must be overcome through education and library policies and improved support for this work. This is an important starting point.

The identification of ways school library services are engaging in supporting political literacy and aspects of the Curriculum for Excellence will hopefully prove to be a useful resource for school library staff seeking to develop their services within schools that have been reluctant to allow information literacy instruction and other library provision deemed too political. These examples of successful initiatives and strategies are taking place in small pockets around the country and should be encouraged elsewhere.

³⁶ Campbell, D. (2008). Voice in the Classroom: How an Open Classroom Climate Fosters Political Engagement Among Adolescents. *Political Behaviour*, 30, pp.437–454.

³⁷ Eichhorn, J. (2014). Young votes and the referendum - a legacy.

<http://www.centreonconstitutionalchange.ac.uk/blog/young-voters-and-referendum-%E2%80%93-legacy>

Appendix A: Survey

Information about the Survey

About the Learning Lending Liberty Project

The Learning Lending Liberty Project is funded by a CILIP Information Literacy Group and will run from May - October 2015. The project is exploring what information needs young people have when learning about politics and will identify how library staff can and do support these needs.

About the Survey

This survey is being conducted to find out what information libraries provided people with about the Scottish Independence Referendum and the General Election. We are trying to find out what kinds of provision were made in schools and what considerations were made when deciding on what information to provide and how to provide it.

This survey is one of the data collection methods being used to identify how school libraries supported the provision of political information during the periods around the Referendum and the General Election. It will help to answer the following questions:

- In the run up to the Referendum and the General Election, what provision was made in schools to help pupils understand and participate?
- How did school libraries support this provision through access to information and information literacy instruction?
- How consistent was this provision across schools?
- What sources of information outside of school did young people use?
- How do young people use mainstream media and social media to become politically informed, in relation to the Scottish Independence Referendum and the General Election?

Your Information

All the data collected in the project will be stored securely and used anonymously. If at any point you no longer wish for your data to be used in the project, you can let us know and we will withdraw it immediately.

If you are interested in the results of the research, any reports and outputs will be provided on the Learning Lending Liberty website: <http://www.learninglendingliberty.wordpress.com>

Contact

You can contact Lauren Smith, the primary researcher for the project, at learninglendingliberty@gmail.com. You can also contact the CILIP Information Literacy Group at cilipilg@gmail.com

Questions

Q1 What is the name of the school in which you work?

Q2 In what region of Scotland is the school in which you work?

- Aberdeen (1)
- Aberdeenshire (2)
- Angus (3)
- Argyll & Bute (4)
- Clackmannanshire (5)
- Dumfries & Galloway (6)
- Dundee City (7)
- East Ayrshire (8)
- East Dunbartonshire (9)
- East Lothian (10)
- East Renfrewshire (11)
- Edinburgh City (12)
- Falkirk (13)
- Fife (14)
- Glasgow (15)
- Highland (16)
- Inverclyde (17)
- Midlothian (18)
- Moray (19)
- Na h-Eileanan Siar (Western Isles) (20)
- North Ayrshire (21)
- North Lanarkshire (22)
- Orkney Islands (23)
- Perth & Kinross (24)
- Renfrewshire (25)
- Scottish Borders (26)
- Shetland Islands (27)
- South Ayrshire (28)
- South Lanarkshire (29)
- Stirling (30)
- West Dunbartonshire (31)
- West Lothian (32)

Q3 What is your role title? (Please enter role title e.g. librarian, library assistant, learning centre manager)

Q4 How many hours a week is the school library open? (Please enter number of hours)

Q5 How many hours a week is the library open and staffed? (Please enter number of hours)

Q6 How many hours a week is the library staffed overall? (Please enter number of hours)

Q7 Do you provide information literacy instruction (either in the library or outside of the library)?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- I don't know (3)
- Other (please give details) (4) _____

Q8 Which of the resources below are available for students in your school? (Please tick all that apply and feel free to add your own answers in the text box)

- Books about the political system (1)
- Books about social and political issues (2)
- Computers with internet access (3)
- Newspapers and magazines (4)
- Citizenship lessons (5)
- Politics lessons (6)
- Displays about politics (7)
- Other (please specify) (8) _____

Q9 To what extent do you think your library has enough resources about the political system and politics more generally? (0 = not enough, 100 = enough)

- _____ Books about politics (1)
- _____ Books about social and political issues (2)
- _____ Computers with internet access (3)
- _____ Newspapers and magazines (4)
- _____ Citizenship education (5)
- _____ Politics education (6)
- _____ Displays about politics (7)

Q10 What provision is made in your school for teaching students about how they can participate in politics? (Please describe)

Q11 Are you involved in supporting any of these activities? (You can explain your response in the text boxes below your answer)

- Yes (1) _____
- No (2) _____
- Other (3) _____

Q12 Are you involved in supporting Global Citizenship as part of the Curriculum for Excellence? You can explain your response in the text boxes below your answer)

- Yes (1) _____
- No (2) _____
- Other (3) _____

Q13 Do you think the library has a role to play in supporting the Global Citizenship aspects of the Curriculum for Excellence? (You can explain your view in the text boxes below your choice)

- Yes (1) _____
- Maybe (2) _____
- No (3) _____
- I don't know (4) _____

Q14 If you teach information literacy, does your work ever involve talking about politics or political issues with students? (You can explain your response in the text boxes below your answer)

- Yes (1) _____
- No (2) _____
- I don't know (3) _____

Q15 Do you think that information literacy should involve talking about politics or political issues with students? (You can explain your view in the text boxes below your choice)

- Yes (1) _____
- No (2) _____
- I don't know (3) _____

Q16 In the run up to the Scottish Independence Referendum, did students seek information from the school library (including library staff)? (You can explain your response in the text boxes below your answer)

- Yes (1) _____
- No (2) _____
- I don't know (3) _____

Q17 *In the run up to the General Election, did students seek information from the school library (including library staff)? (You can explain your response in the text boxes below your answer)*

- Yes (1) _____
- No (2) _____
- I don't know (3) _____

Q18 *Would you be willing to take part in an interview to explore the topics in this survey in more depth?*

- Yes (please enter your email address below) (1) _____
- No (2)